

## CHAPTER 6: SPRING 1876

‘A terribly cold north-east wind and a slight fall of snow, threateningly more... it seems still very uncertain when the school returns, maybe 21<sup>st</sup> (but probably not), or 28<sup>th</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> February,’ wrote Mrs Hodgkinson from the Lower School to her daughter just after New Year.

Two weeks later came the trustees’ decision that the return would be on 28 January: ‘Pray God keep us this term,’ wrote Thring in his diary: ‘Masters meeting this morning. Had to speak to them strongly about tittle-tattle’.

For a passionate man, he was feeling surprisingly at peace. After the busy weeks of presiding over an empty school, he could now get back to what he judged as ‘proper work’. Although raging at Haviland’s report, he was almost resigned:

‘As we have often said, “If this thing is of God, it will stand; if not, let it go”... It illustrates the impossibility of getting at the truth in a complicated matter... I was almost amused at the ease with which I was made out a liar and a scoundrel. I may yet go down to posterity as the great flogger, a bigoted old hater of pure air and water, and a senseless, unfeeling tyrant over boys’.

He was surely irritated by a letter from Dr Bell asking whether it was he who had told Haviland that Bell had been slow to diagnose the disease - and by another long critical editorial in *The Lancet* backing Haviland and stating: ‘The school assumed a grave responsibility... Sad as the lesson is, it will not be without value if it teaches [the masters] to trust less to their own omniscience and more to the guidance of those best qualified to give advice in such emergencies’.

A few days later, however, he felt more positive. ‘Thirty new boys... and 305 on the school-books, so we have not suffered an appreciable check’, he wrote cheerfully

on 29 January, although he may have been in denial about the real state of numbers: the school roll lists over fifty pupils who left the school in October - December 1875 but only thirty who joined in January. Another sixteen would leave in March, some transferring to rival schools such as Rugby and Repton.

Many of the leavers were from the North-West or London - suggesting a negative parental grapevine there. Two of the houses worst infected by the epidemic were especially depleted: West Deyne and Redgate. It was fortunate that numbers in the school had crept up above Thring’s optimum 300 in the previous years: this allowed for a little unnatural wastage now.

As the term progressed he began to complain that he had too little time for intellectual work and teaching, but he was cheered that ‘the water works on the hill are going well’, and that parliamentary processes for the new water company were under way. The Bill got its second reading in the House of Commons on 25 February, coinciding with a rebuttal in the *BMJ* of Haviland’s assertion that the Lower School supply had been the certain source of the epidemic.

The RSA remained uncertain about the water supply question: reluctant to seem obstructive of the public good, but unenthusiastic about endorsing a company beyond its control, and keen not to let Thring seize the initiative. It instructed Field to assess the best value-for-money option for providing a mains supply, but it also began moves to oppose the Bill or at least to insert a clause protecting its interests.

As February arrived, Thring’s diary remained optimistic: ‘The first week over, such a blessing, and time, the great healer, moving slowly on, carrying us, please God, out of immediate danger by degrees’.

He did however tell a member of staff closest to him that he was taking nothing for granted, and he included the words 'if we are allowed to go on working together'.

His fears were well founded. On 20 February: 'This morning I have entered once again the valley of the shadow of death. Cobb (housemaster of a small house on the High Street, not previously infected) came to tell me he was almost sure that he had a case of typhoid in his house. Poor fellow! He quite broke down... The town has neither flushed the drains nor disinfected them, done nothing except the ventilators they were compelled to put in'.

Thus the roller-coaster of hope and despair began all over again. Lessons had been learned from the previous outbreak: precise information was immediately sent to all parents, Cobb's boys were sent home, and Thring braced himself for a possible rapid exodus from other houses. Two housemasters went to confront the RSA and judged them 'frightened at the gathering storm'. Thring noted two days later: 'For the first time today the sewers have been examined and found foul enough to account for any fever. The rector was hauled out to see them, and he has heard some plain truths too'.

This time, he found the Uppingham parents 'wonderfully steady'. Only one wrote critically, and Liverpool families sent a demand to the LGB for urgent intervention. Tarbotton returned with a medical expert to check the houses. Thring sent his own memorandum to the LGB, assisted by Jacob and Birley (one of whose sons had joined the school that term): they would still support him even if other trustees did not. Bell moved fast to reassure the worried parents of boys with minor ailments, but he was still fending off criticisms of his earlier actions.

*The Lancet* reminded its readers of its (and Haviland's) earlier warnings against the

school reassembling too soon. This view seemed to be supported by suspected new cases in West Deyne and Redgate during that week, although doctors were called in rapidly from London who reported no evidence that the fever was connected with the houses themselves.

Then came news that a boy in Lorne House (next to West Deyne) had been taken home by his parents, and had now developed typhoid symptoms. Thring wrote on 3 March: 'I feel quite sure this is the beginning of the end... the school will slip away like a wreath of snow'. He fulminated against Wales, 'whose letters furnish us with an admirable barometer of what to expect from the powers that be in this place'. *The Lancet* reported 'a case or two in the town itself'.

Soon Bell was seeing growing numbers of boys who feared (wrongly) that they had contracted the disease, whilst also having to defend himself uncomfortably in correspondence with the father of a boy now at home with diarrhoea symptoms. Many telegrams began to arrive from worried parents. It was inevitable that a fresh bout of pupil withdrawals would begin and then accelerate.

Meanwhile for the LGB another round of acrimonious disputes had begun. At New Year it received a copy of the petition from townspeople protesting against Haviland's leaking of his findings. Close on this came an RSA resolution condemning the petition, stating that the MOH had merely done his duty and that he had the RSA's full confidence. Thring and Bell wrote demanding pre-publication copies of Haviland's report and expressing concern that a hostile report would persuade the trustees to delay the pupils' return.

Rawlinson advised the LGB that as the school had fully implemented Tarbotton's recommendations and his own, nothing which Haviland might allege could

materially affect the trustees' decision. The LGB duly forwarded this advice to Thring, an action which outraged the 'astonished' RSA and led to a visit to London from Barnard Smith who succeeded only in irritating LGB officials.

A subsequent internal memorandum from Rawlinson denounced the town's inactivity over many years, contrasting it with the school's urgency in hiring Tarbotton. Rawlinson added that the RSA and Haviland 'think far too much about the school and far too little about the town, as it is clear that the school drainage was retarded by the defective state of the sewers. If these had been perfect, Hodgkinson need not have constructed [his Lower School] cesspits'.

Unaware of Rawlinson's view, the RSA wrote again complaining that it had 'not received the courtesy and support which they might have expected from the Board'.

Things became no better for the LGB once Haviland's report was made public. Bell disputed Haviland's charges point by point in a long letter on 5 February: 'The whole report is open to very severe and just criticism: it quibbles over trifles, it enters so extensively into personalities in a manner so much to be regretted, it is so voluminous that the cause of the outbreak is almost lost'.

The LGB decided not to forward this diatribe to Haviland and replied that it could not take sides between the two doctors, after which Mullins weighed in, sending the LGB a complaint about Haviland's comments on the dormitories in West Deyne, and denying allegations that infected boys had been allowed to enter other houses.

The RSA then returned to the attack, criticising an assertion by Rawlinson that his report had been a response to a request from the school and its trustees. The latter had never been involved, the RSA claimed

(rightly). Moreover, Thring had been wrong in going to the LGB behind the RSA's back.

It disputed Rawlinson's view that the school had completed its improvements, claiming that as late as 18 January nothing had been done at the sanatorium, not even the emptying of cesspits. It had been promised that Rawlinson's report would not be published before Haviland and Field had completed their work. It even criticised Rawlinson's investigation: 'He visited the town only once, and that for [only] four hours. And this is called a royal commission!' Rawlinson again told the LGB that the RSA was concerned only to protect itself.

By late February, with news filtering through of the new typhoid cases in the school, a new figure emerged in the LGB's files. Joseph Rayner wrote on behalf of the Liverpool parents (who were now notably more supportive of the school than during the previous autumn). He contrasted the recent pro-activity of the school with the inactivity of the RSA, and demanded that the LGB exercise its rarely-used powers to *order* sewerage improvements in the town.

The LGB dutifully asked Thring for formal confirmation that the disease had reappeared, and received in return an explosion of anguish spread over no fewer than fifteen sides of paper: there was great alarm at the school; Tarbotton had been called in again but the town had done nothing; sewers remained unflushed and the wells were still dangerous.

During the first fortnight of March Thring contacted the LGB three times again about new cases - in West Deyne, Redgate and in his own house on 13 March. Worse still, the new well which the school had sunk outside the town for its own use had been pronounced unsafe by water experts.

This had convinced him that there was no alternative to breaking up on 14 March,

and once again he asserted (with no expectation of success) that 'it is for the London authorities to determine what course of action should be taken that will enable the school to return with safety to Uppingham'.

Meanwhile Haviland had also been very active, returning to Uppingham to investigate this latest outbreak. He reported to the RSA that the school's welcome had not been exactly warm, and he hoped that Barnard Smith would complain to the LGB about that hostility. He had arrived as soon as his many other commitments allowed, but had meanwhile sent the inspector of nuisances, Mr James, on ahead to see Cobb, in whose house the latest problems had started:

'Mr Cobb being at school and engaged until 12 noon, Mr James called again at 12.10 and found Mr Cobb at home. Mr Cobb [said] 'he would meet Mr Haviland either in the street or at the Falcon but he would not see him at his house... [Mr James] said I would only meet him at his house, where the enquiry must necessarily be made. Mr Cobb's reply to my message was: 'His compliments, and he had nothing to say'.

The RSA made much of this incident, immediately informing the LGB which noted: 'It is most unfortunate that so much ill-feeling exists between the school and the sanitary authority, as it entirely prevents any co-operation between them'. It sent a copy to Thring, who replied tactfully that perhaps there was some misunderstanding: Cobb had merely been informed that Haviland was back in the town, and had said that he (Cobb) had no reason to meet him. There had been no suggestion, however, that Cobb would refuse to speak to Haviland at the house.

Although keen to defend his beleaguered housemaster, he conceded that the misunderstanding was not helpful and that with hindsight things could have been

handled better, but he added: 'When we admitted Mr Haviland in October last to *all* our houses, he took advantage of it to make statements about our inner life'.

Thring also stated that he thought Haviland should have informed housemasters before visiting their houses, but the school had nothing to hide, and the MOH was now free to go wherever he chose. He concluded: 'I wish in all things to show respect to authority', regretting if any contrary impression had been given.

Two days later Barnard Smith again called on the LGB, at short notice, stating that he was anxious to clear the way for 'immediate action', now that there were new cases in the school. The LGB's notes suggest that this was a more cordial and constructive meeting than their previous encounter and, concerned that important evidence should not be lost by delay, it asked one of its medical inspectors to visit Uppingham (a visit unfortunately postponed when the inspector's mother was taken ill).

Only a day later, however, the RSA once again complained bitterly that it had 'met with antagonism where it had every right to expect co-operation', and that it was being 'condemned as supine, indifferent and inactive'. We do not know what provoked this, but the LGB reiterated its impartiality and then got on with replying to a long succession of routine queries from the RSA's clerk: whether the expenses of recent enquiries could be settled by post office order; how to deal with a disputed surcharge revealed in a recent audit, and whether there would be a conflict of interest if the son of a RSA member was allowed to tender for the milk contract at the workhouse.

Deadlock would increase the chances of the school's permanent closure. Radical thinking was needed, but this was unlikely from the RSA, or from the LGB whose President defended its non-interventionist

stance in a similar epidemic in Lancashire when he spoke in parliament on 11 April.

By then, a new debate had begun. Talk within the school of leaving Uppingham began around 4 March and is generally credited to William Campbell, housemaster of Lorne House: a man of long experience and few flights of fancy. He articulated this adventurous possibility at a housemasters' meeting with a memorable, dramatic question: 'Don't you think we ought to flit?'

As the idea gained support, Thring told his brother that Uppingham was more vulnerable than better-known schools such as Marlborough and Winchester: 'I doubt whether Tuesday next will see us with a third of the boys left here. They are melting away. This is ruin. We are thinking of migrating to the Lakes... our classes together there till the summer'.

He needed the backing of those trustees whom he could persuade. Jacob and Birley met him in Manchester on 7 March, where Birley told him that the newspapers there had been besieged by parents wanting to place adverts for private tutors and alternative schools.

However, Birley also knew of a hotel-keeper in Wales who was keen to get the school. This idea caught Thring's imagination, and he told the two men that there was unanimous support for Campbell's proposal. The claim was hardly true. At least two housemasters opposed even a temporary removal, although a third wrote to one of his parents that migration was the only option for survival: 'If we do not assemble somewhere while [improvement] work is being done, the school will surely vanish'. Thring added that there was also 'good likely to accrue to every boy's character who shall come and share our difficulties in this crisis... so we hope for the confidence and support of all parents'.

Once back in Uppingham, Thring wrote to AC Johnson, the chairman of the trustees. Johnson had already given Thring a free hand in principle on the question of moving, but who needed to know the details to try to persuade his fellow board members. Thring suggested 'that the school will break up for its Easter holidays on Tuesday next, and that we shall reassemble in three weeks' time... in some healthy locality away from Uppingham. Most probably Borth, near Aberystwyth'.

Within a few days local and national papers and the *BMJ* were reporting that the plan would become reality. Even *The Lancet* expressed sympathy for the school, although it did not mention Thring's plan to move. Its target for criticism was Rawlinson who (it said), although aware of Haviland's earlier misgivings about the school reassembling, 'assumed a great responsibility in speaking so decidedly with respect to the sanitary improvements. The school authorities are therefore greatly to be pitied; they asked advice, and they spent their money freely in improvements, and now they have a second [epidemic] which, we fear, must cause them severe pecuniary loss'.

Some of the trustees were very hostile to the migration proposal, especially as news of it had reached them not from Thring but through rumour and gossip. Wales, who must have understood the likely impact on the town better than those trustees living further afield, led the protests. Thring wrote to Birley: 'The rector has put his foot into it, having prevented a meeting of the trustees being called by saying there was no need. And he has already been using threats against us for our action. Let them do their worst'.

The trustees had the constitutional power to stop the plan, but some feared the school's permanent closure if they did so. Despite Wales's opposition, a meeting was arranged. Thring approached the day with anxiety: 'The rector was sententious and

threatening to one of the masters. [He said] the trustees would stop it all. He might just as well try to stop a train with his finger. All the masters are unanimous. Legal or illegal, change of air is the only possible prescription’.

The meeting took place on 11 March, four days later than the masters had wished. The minute book tells us little: ‘A statement of the Rev Edward Thring [on] the second outbreak of typhoid was read... in consequence the trustees sanctioned the proposal of the headmaster to break it up’.

Despite the much more important and urgent issue confronting them, they first demanded that the housemasters send them details of the dimensions and ventilation arrangements in every dormitory - suggesting that they wished to make a point about the extent of their authority, and that they were taking Haviland’s criticisms very seriously.

When they finally addressed the main question they reserved their position pending further developments and more information. As a body they were seriously divided. Johnson stepped down from the chair for part of the meeting, probably under criticism for exceeding his powers.

They resented being presented with what seemed to be a *fait accompli* and some were angry that Thring appeared already to have briefed the newspapers. The *Stamford Mercury* and the *Manchester Critic* had carried reports a day or two earlier that reassembly of the school was planned to take place ‘in three weeks’ time at some healthy locality away from Uppingham’ and *The Times* had quickly picked up the story. The *Mercury* even told its readers that the move would be ‘either to North Wales or the Lakes’.

Thring’s diary suggests a robust debate: ‘The first battle on the whole won. The trustees have sanctioned the break-up of the school, but on ---’s (possibly Wales’s)

dictation would not put on record any expression with reference to the migration; in [one trustee’s] words, ‘They knew nothing of the school till it came back again.’ They were, in effect, washing their hands of it financially. He also inveighed against an (un-named) opponent:

‘He spoke of the [new] buildings as burdensome to the trust, and endeavoured, whilst taking over some £14,000 worth of property from our hands, to saddle us with the burden of any deficit’.

The same speaker had then demanded that one master remain in Uppingham to teach the day boys. ‘I said I should not leave any of my staff, but if necessary a man might be got to do it, or the day boys could come with us, and the trustees could pay a fair proportion of their board and lodging. Then he threatened that the trustees would cut [our] salaries. I quietly pointed out that the scheme [of governance] appointed that tuition fees must first go to paying the masters’.

Over the following days, Thring’s mood oscillated between despair and elation: ‘A very good sermon from Christian (the chaplain). When shall I spend a Sunday again as headmaster in this place? I had a feeling as I stood in chapel to-day, never - never; but then I looked up... and I felt more than ever... a great shaping power guiding this work... and friendship and help all round about one’.

Although daunting, the trustees’ meeting had strengthened his resolve: he would have to decide his own destiny. He was buoyed up by the now-unanimous backing of the masters and their offers of financial support. The LGB was taking a closer interest again. The headmaster of Rugby had written a second time, promising not to capitalize on Uppingham’s misfortune by encouraging parents to transfer to him. *The Times* published *Pater Alumni*’s long letter contrasting the ‘plague-stricken city’ and the supine attitude of the town with

the imagination of the school in seeking to leave it.

On 13 March, the day that a boy in Thring's own house contracted typhoid, he preached at the end of term service: 'Difficulties become tests of willingness and strength; all hardship, when overcome, strengthens life'. It was, wrote one master, a day of 'wild winds and pitiless snows [as we] gathered, with thin ranks, for the last time. In a few hours we shall separate, to meet, who knows certainly where'.

One omen seemed good. The Old Testament lesson appointed for the day described Jacob's wanderings in the wilderness, including the words: 'I am with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest and will bring thee again into this land'. That evening Thring wrote: 'Some marvellous divine purpose will come out of it all. Tomorrow I start for Liverpool and on Tuesday for Borth and other places in North Wales. Borth seems likely'.

Little would have been secret in a tight-knit community, but the RSA made no immediate response other than to confirm that it would press for a clause in the waterworks Bill to protect its interests. Barnard Smith and Wales must have known of the economic impact of a prolonged absence by the school, but they would also have weighed up all the difficulties and risks that Thring's plan implied: logistical and financial; the impact on pupil recruitment and retention; on masters having to uproot their families. The two town leaders calculated that the school could not stay away for long. To let it go, causing a brief economic blizzard in the town, would provoke less anger amongst local ratepayers than giving in to Thring's demands for expensive improvements which might hit those ratepayers even harder in the long run.

By mid-March, however, alarm was belatedly stirring in the town as the

implications of the school's impending absence sank in. The RSA received a demand from a group of local shopkeepers and suppliers to be admitted to its next meeting. Barnard Smith prevaricated (claiming that an LGB inspector was due again shortly). Undeterred, the protesters asked the churchwardens for a meeting to discuss necessary town improvements.

The meeting on 23 March was heated, amid rumours that the RSA was planning its own water supply at a price which would undercut Thring's scheme. Lower prices would be welcome, but what smacked of a spoiling operation against the school by the RSA was not. The opposition was voiced by two housemaster-ratepayers and by Dr Bell, though others who had signed the petition were largely silent - for now.

Four motions were passed: that a private water company was preferable to one organized by the RSA; that a surface supply would not do; that the meeting disapproved of any spending by the RSA on plans for a surface supply, and that a copy of all these resolutions should be sent to the LGB. Bell dispatched this with alacrity on the following day.

The meeting coincided with further anonymous correspondence in *The Times* over three days. *A member of the school* reiterated the RSA's negligence, only to be contradicted by *One of the sanitary authority*, who emphasised what a healthy place the town had always been, its inhabitants' sense of safety, and the extent of past and planned future improvements.

This was echoed in the *Manchester Critic* by *One of the townsfolk* who chided the paper for its pro-school stance, blaming past delays on inadequate bye-laws and 'legal see-sawing', comparing the Uppingham RSA authorities very favourably with its equivalent body in Manchester and - most alarmingly for Thring - questioning whether Borth would

in fact prove to be any safer a place than Uppingham for the school to be.

Nevertheless, for Thring the die was cast and only one familiar challenge remained: the attitude of trustees. They reassembled on 24 March, deeply wary. They formally encouraged the RSA to carry out all Field's proposals, banned any housemaster from taking more than 30 boarders, and decreed that no boys in any house recently infected should be allowed to return without Thring's permission.

They went on to deal him further blows. On being told formally that he had arranged the school's removal to Borth, they resolved to put just £50 towards the costs of travel, board and lodging of those day-boys who chose to go with the rest. This was unrealistically small (and only half the sum agreed at the same meeting as a bonus to their clerk for all his recent extra work). They declined to make any decision on travel costs for the masters.

They had decided to be trustees of the school *at Uppingham* in the most literal sense of the term, with no other firm commitment. Maybe they reckoned that as they controlled less than half of the school's total annual expenditure, Thring and the housemasters should have to meet all the other costs.

Trustees and headmaster appeared to be living in parallel worlds, although Thring tried in his diary to see it all in positive terms: 'I feel so grateful at the deliverance from the town. It is like an escape out of prison. Things may be hard at Borth, but it is the hardness of liberty'. Even so, there was no disguising the fact that effectively he was to be on his own.

Barely three weeks after Campbell first suggested that they might 'flit', Thring and his staff left the town. There was little time to pack up personal items and equipment and to arrange for Bell to keep an eye on their houses.

The Lower School pupils remained. We cannot be sure whether Hodgkinson decided not to go with Thring because he sensed that it was the wrong decision; whether he thought that younger boys were too vulnerable to be uprooted, or whether Thring persuaded him to stay in Uppingham because of the shortage of accommodation at Borth. However, the decision seems strange, given the threat which typhoid posed to younger boys.

At this point nearly all parties had a great deal to lose. Thring and the masters were running up alarming costs even if (as they hoped) most parents sent their boys to Borth and the venture lasted only for a few weeks. Preparations for the water company were as yet incomplete and the RSA was showing no sense of urgency over sewerage improvements. The trustees' future attitude was hard to gauge.

For the trustees the school's absence was a financial headache and, despite their pronouncement about being responsible only for it *at Uppingham*, they were answerable to the Charity Commissioners for it. Their social standing locally would not be improved if it suffered.

Town ratepayers faced a harsh economic future. They had plenty to fear from rapid, expensive sanitary improvement. A mains water supply had cost implications, whoever provided it. However, they faced crippling, unforeseen loss of trade through the absence for an unknown length of time of the town's largest business and its principal employer.

The RSA's leading figures faced a formidable volume of extra worry, work and technical complexity. Details, estimates, tenders and loan arrangements would need to be properly worked out. These would take time, and there was a risk of costly mistakes. They were uncertain whether the townspeople, the school, the LGB and the press would make allowance for this. After so long as RSA



chairman, Barnard Smith was weary of the burden: on 29 March (and not for the first time) he told his fellow-guardians that he would retire when the time was right.

Meanwhile defeat, real or perceived, for the RSA at Thring's hands by rapidly acceding to his demands would be a humiliation and a threat to its members' local prestige and influence, but they were confident that Thring had over-reached himself. They knew the trustees would not put large-scale finance into his scheme. Mrs Bell recorded that 'some of the guardians were saying that nothing would be done, and Mr Thring would have to bring the school back to the town as he left it'. There were things to be said for procrastination, provided that the RSA could persuade the ratepayers to be patient.

Finally, there were consequences for the LGB. Claims and counter-claims continued to rain down from both sides. For the LGB's officials, however, Uppingham was just one of many local problems requiring their attention: a small town with a relatively insignificant typhoid outbreak - but one which was creating a great deal of work. They still preferred not to take sides, but there were risks to their credibility and reputation if, later on, a desperate, well-connected school united with a resentful RSA to scapegoat them.

Bell remained in Uppingham rather than going to Borth. He could not desert his town patients, and during any absence his practice would be rapidly eroded by his two rival doctors. However, he remained the school's MO, and it fell to him to write letters to parents of boys who previously had mild typhoid and now needed permission to re-join the school at Borth.

When news reached him of Childs's appointment as school MO at Borth, he realised the long-term risk to his own position. If the school closed, or stayed away permanently, his role would end. Meanwhile it would be Childs, not he, who

would have Thring's ear: something he could not afford to ignore and which made him highly zealous in the school's cause.

Initially, he corresponded with all the housemasters to reassure them about the sanitary and other state of their empty houses. It suited him that Thring asked for this as he (Bell) was fearful of losing the housemasters' confidence. He lobbied Thring regularly by letter for reassurance, insecure about whether some housemasters might decide to ask one of the other doctors to undertake future checks on the physical state of the empty houses.

More positively, Bell became the school's eyes and ears in Uppingham, and its main protagonist, sending regular news down to Borth. His *Letterbook* (along with the LGB papers) is a major source of information. Unsurprisingly it gives prominence to everything that he did on the school's behalf, and it reveals an inveterate and caustic letter-writer, inclined to see conspiracies at every turn.

The reappearance of typhoid in March 1876 demonstrated its elusive nature. Town and school authorities were no nearer to discovering the origin of either outbreak, other than increasingly suspecting that it was water-borne, although both outbreaks might have been caused by returning pupils or someone in the town. This time though, no-one could reasonably blame inaction by Bell.

Meanwhile, for the school it remained to be seen whether Borth would be any less prone to epidemics than Uppingham. If not, this could be another reason why Thring might be forced into a humiliating retreat back to Uppingham with his sanitary and water supply aims unachieved. It is unlikely as he got to know his new surroundings that Thring ever considered this to be an option, but he must have wondered in his darker moments whether the school would survive.

*A Special General Meeting of the Trustees  
held at Uppingham on Saturday the 17<sup>th</sup> day of March 1876*

*Present*

*A. C. Johnson Esq. Chairman  
The Rev. J. H. Sudger The Rev. the Chancellor  
W. J. Jacob Esq. Wales  
G. H. Finch Esq. M.P. The Rev. J. Mould  
J. H. Bailey Esq. J. H. L. Worsfield Esq.*

*A statement of the Rev. Edward Thring to the Chairman  
in reference to the second outbreak of typhoid fever in the  
school was produced and read.*

*Resolved*

*That in consequence of the reappearance of fever in the school  
the Trustees sanction the proposal of the Head Master to break  
it up.*

*14<sup>th</sup> July 1876*

*A letter from Mr. Thomas Bell respecting the reappearance  
of cases of typhoid fever at Uppingham was produced and  
ordered to be filed.*

*That while in the opinion of the Trustees there is nothing  
in the present condition of the Town of Uppingham which  
calls upon them to rescind their resolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> ult.  
yet having regard to a memorial addressed to them by the  
whole body of the Assistant Masters they are willing in  
compliance with the same that the school should remain  
at Uppingham during the autumn term.*

Extracts from the trustees' minute book for two key meetings in March and July 1876.

*To the Churchwardens of the Par  
Uppingham*

*We the undersigned request the  
Churchwardens to call a Meeting of the  
Ratepayers for Thursday next March  
2<sup>nd</sup> at 12 o'clock at noon to take into  
consideration the sanitary requirements  
of the Town as set forth in the report of  
Rogers Field Esq. &c.*

*Thomas Bell William Wilford  
Charles Basilin Mrs. Dalby  
Marko Braithwaite Henry King  
John Hawthorn Charles Wright  
Maule Hubbard Charles White  
George A. Tomshurst  
W. Wilford.*

*In compliance with the above requisition  
Notice is hereby given that a Meeting of the  
Ratepayers will be held in the Boys Nar-  
-tional School room on Thursday March  
2<sup>nd</sup> 1876 at 12 o'clock at noon.*

*John B. Mould } Churchward.*

The ratepayers' petition in March 1876, demanding a meeting with the leaders of the RSA.

## CHAPTER 7: SUMMER 1876

On 26 March Thring sent a telegram from Borth to one of his housemasters who had yet to leave Uppingham: 'It is flat treason and treachery. I have wired to stop it'. We do not know to what this refers, but it seems clear that distance had done little to dispel his anger at the events of the previous months.

More cheerfully, on the next day a specially chartered train brought essential equipment (including the cricket roller) from Uppingham to Borth and the boys arrived a week later. Fewer than a dozen failed to appear, which he took as a rousing vote of confidence from parents. Soon after that a clever little satire began to circulate, penned by one of the boys and entitled *How I came to Borth*:

'Leave bickerings and cesspools far behind,  
Take thy stern future with a quiet mind.  
Better are herbs and peace, be well assured,  
Than all the Local Sanitary Board.  
Weigh dilute sewage 'gainst pure mountain  
springs,  
Weigh unflushed drains 'gainst air the salt sea  
brings  
Weigh all the chances well with equal scales  
Since Wales won't come to you then go to  
Wales.'

It did not take long to find its way back to Uppingham, where the rector predictably took offence at the use of his name in this play on words. Bell wrote to Thring urging him to stop boys writing such things; they would not help, especially at a time when public opinion might just be starting to move in favour of the school.

The poem did, however, add some spice to the annual RSA elections in late April, which offered both sides the chance to test local opinion, but also exposed them to potential rejection. For the school, getting new blood on to the RSA was an attractive prospect. Bell believed the election would be close-run, but he identified some potentially vulnerable existing members,

and both he and solicitor John Pateman stood as candidates.

As Election Day approached, 'race pamphlets' were produced: anonymous reports on the election and its likely results with nicknames such as *Blue Pill* for Bell and *Little Awkward* for Barnard Smith.

The RSA clerk, WH Brown, was election organiser. He intended to make no allowance for the absent masters when deciding how much time should elapse between sending out the voting papers and holding the count. Thus those far away in Borth risked being disenfranchised.

One housemaster had written to the LGB about this threat before leaving Uppingham, warning of the logistical difficulties of voting from afar and making it clear that the masters were 'exceedingly interested in the outcome', but the LGB now declared itself powerless to intervene.

Brown took the ballot papers to the various school houses at the last moment legally allowed, but Bell had drawn up a plan to frustrate him. Supporters of the school followed the clerk round as he delivered the voting slips, collecting them up from each house and passing them to Charles White, the ironmonger. Joseph Woodcock (baker/greengrocer), arguably the guardian most hostile to Barnard Smith, provided a dogcart and horses, and White was taken straight to Rugby station where he caught the last train of the day. It was a slow one and he travelled right through the night, arriving at Borth early next morning.

He found Thring and the masters waiting on the station platform with tables and pens at the ready. Mrs Thring brought him breakfast, and within minutes (the train having travelled down to the terminus at Aberystwyth and back again), White was on the return journey to Rugby with the completed voting papers, to be met there again by Woodcock. They handed in the

votes with fifteen minutes to spare. The journey proved fruitful: after disputes over doubtful or spoilt papers, several opponents of the school were voted off.

As one of the successful candidates, Bell became a thorn in the flesh of those RSA members who were happy to see the school suffer. He challenged the size of Brown's salary as clerk and lobbied hard to speed up the drainage improvements and the water company's formation. He also threatened a legal challenge against any expenses claimed by RSA members in their opposition to the water Bill, and demanded that the government auditor surcharge them.

The RSA for its part remained concerned about the lack of control it would have over a private company. It again asked Brown to explore ways of protecting its interests - such as being exempt from any financial liability for roadworks caused by pipe-laying. However, it had no real idea about how to achieve this control within the Bill: Brown was instructed merely to obstruct it, and Wales told Bell that 'there was no hurry about it'.

Invited back by the RSA to examine experimental drilling by the company of new wells to the south of the town, Field told the LGB that he doubted whether a sufficient supply would be found there. He was right: workmen drilled down 420 feet, but to no avail, which led the RSA to claim that the company's plans would never provide sufficient water for regular flushing of the sewers.

Bell told Thring and Birley that all this was merely mischief-making, but as the company turned to other possible sites, Birley let slip at a trustees' meeting that one of these was on land between the sanatorium and the workhouse (now Constables).

Wales, as ever deeply conflicted by being a trustee and a leading RSA member, put

the latter interest first and informed Haviland, who stated that this new site would be far too near the sanatorium cesspits which had been so roundly condemned earlier. He ignored the fact that they had been recently drained and filled with quicklime.

All this argument brought home to the RSA the dangers of procrastination if it risked the provision of better water failing altogether. It therefore asked Field to consider the feasibility of a rival scheme based on local springs. Field replied that this would depend on rainfall projections: any scheme would need to produce 50,000-60,000 gallons per day, and although he had found a pure source, he was less sure of its volume. He would continue to experiment, but if any site needed steam pumps, it would surely prove to be too expensive an option.

Bell meanwhile became a go-between for the RSA and the solicitors acting for the water company. He made suggestions about the share issue, reported progress on the trial borings to Thring and asked the solicitors for assurances to be given to the RSA that the price of the water would be reasonable. Guided from Borth by Mullins (a keen meteorologist), Bell produced monthly rainfall statistics, in an attempt to allay Field's doubts about the supply.

Before Field's researches were complete, the LGB came out decisively in support of the private company, judging that the RSA (unlike a USA) had no statutory power to oppose it. This was a rich irony, given the RSA's demands over many years for USA status, but the LGB sensed that Barnard Smith and others had been engaged in a spoiling operation. There was no guarantee that Field and the RSA could produce a viable scheme, and with the school threatening to remain away from the town for an unlimited period, the Bill should go ahead. Rawlinson, ever-supportive of local autonomy, dissented privately, feeling that the LGB should back the RSA.

In response to this, the angry RSA sent another deputation to the LGB on 13 May. Bell asked unsuccessfully to be included, in order to keep watch on its other members, but on its return he managed quickly to discover (as he wrote to Thring) that the deputation, which had arrived confident of winning the LGB's support, had been shocked at the cold reception it received, and at the instruction given to put its house in order. It was this which was decisive in preventing further delay, the RSA reluctantly deciding that it must back off - either because of a shortage of funds and expertise, or resulting from a belated recognition of the town's interests as the local economy stagnated.

Despite Haviland's continuing opposition, the Uppingham Water Bill had its third reading in the House of Commons and received the royal assent by 13 July. Thring and his four fellow-directors (including Birley and Jacob and Hawthorn), gained powers to raise capital by issuing shares, make borrowings and levy charges up to specified limits. The company had a year to deliver its promises, after which the powers would lapse. Work on the water supply could now begin in earnest.

Sewerage improvements had proceeded only tortuously. It was clear that they would take far longer than the single school term which Thring had envisaged.

Early in May, Field lodged his outline sewerage proposals with the LGB and Rawlinson approved them. They included replacing manhole covers and installing flushing boxes along the High Street; laying sections of pipe at greater depths; repairing the existing system and creating branch sewers between High Street East (via Queen Street and Adderley Street) and the south sewer below the cemetery.

Field stated that completing the drawings would take at least six weeks, after which work could not begin for three or four

months, because tenders would have to be invited and scrutinised; sureties produced; loans agreed; contracts drawn up and contractors' plant hired.

Bell disputed the timescale and feared that Field's gloomy predictions about the future water supply might become a pretext for the RSA to slow the work down. There was the prospect of yet more delay when the LGB decided to send a medical inspector to check on progress, but its decision was overtaken by the emergence of three simultaneous sources of pressure.

First, as the two largest land and property owners in the town, Lord Gainsborough and Sir Charles Adderley lodged a formal petition with the LGB, urging it to investigate the RSA's inactivity: they claimed it was essential to have sewerage works complete by the end of the summer holidays, or Christmas at the latest.

The RSA was again stung by what it saw as interference from Thring's rich and influential contacts. Repeating many of its earlier grievances, it demanded full support from the LGB. The LGB again emphasised its even-handedness, called for greater harmony and postponed its inspector's visit, but declared that it would not be dictated to by the RSA, which it believed was side-stepping the main issue. It believed that ratepayer opinion would start to shift against the RSA.

Secondly, the LGB was lobbied by a new group of Liverpool parents, led by a Captain Withington, demanding that it intervene legally to get the action needed for the school's speedy return. With the Borth venture apparently going well, parents (once so hostile) were seeing Thring's actions as imaginative, even heroic, in the face of small-minded local bureaucrats. Like Rayner's initiative a few weeks earlier, this clarion call from the school's north-west recruiting heartland gave Thring strong encouragement.

Thirdly, there was a question in parliament from a local MP on 4 May. *Hansard* records that the LGB President, Sclater Booth, replied: 'My attention has been called to the unfortunate circumstances which have led to the withdrawal of a well-known school to the coast... I have now every reason to believe that the sanitary authority is ready and willing to undertake such works of sewerage and water supply as are required to put their district into a satisfactory state, and that they have taken the necessary steps (Hear hear)'.

Under this combined pressure the LGB ordered the RSA to start sewerage improvements forthwith. It also complained at not yet having received the plans and estimates and it issued a veiled threat: it was receiving complaints about the RSA which it hoped it would 'not be necessary to investigate'.

Unabashed, the RSA retorted that it would 'not venture to express an opinion on the vexatious character of the interference to which [it has] been subjected throughout the discharge of [its] duties in very difficult and unexpected circumstances', and that it would welcome any such investigation. It persisted in queries about its bye-laws and on whom the costs of printing Haviland's report should fall.

It did, however, send a report from Field on the latest situation, and agreed to send representatives to the LGB within days to discuss it. On 13 May the LGB finally approved Haviland's reappointment as MOH, which the RSA had been asking for since February. Bell thought Haviland's reappointment was deplorable, but inevitable.

During June the RSA promised the LGB that, to speed up the work, it would accelerate the usual tender procedure, and it promised to use 'a local contractor of standing'. The LGB finally received Field's plans and estimates and authorized

in principle the loan to pay for them but, ever mindful of procedure, it decided that a local enquiry must be held before the loan was confirmed. Notices advising ratepayers about the loan should be posted in the usual way: the enquiry would examine not only the case for the loan, but also broader questions about the state of the town.

Major Tulloch, the inspector, arrived on 7 July. Bell gleefully reported to Thring how tempers quickly frayed as Tulloch complained that the RSA had sent him only the reports from Haviland and Field, omitting those more sympathetic to the school from Tarbotton and Rawlinson. He summarily dismissed objections from the RSA about the advertisement process.

When he went out to see the town for himself, it was a hot July day (which must have encouraged the miasma theorists). According to Bell: 'The drains luckily stank on that day their best. Major Tulloch said the state of the place was a scandal and that the works must be done. His duties took him to many queer places, but he had never been in one so openly foul'.

Thring added that 'Townspeople spoke pleasantly of the school, and money statistics were advanced without contradiction to show how much the town gained by [its presence]'.

Even after this embarrassment, Bell feared - with reason - that the RSA might delay things. It resented the LGB insisting on open competition for the tenders by including firms from beyond the immediate locality, and it objected to the proposal for a bonus for the contractor if the work was completed on time.

Once it was clear that the school would not return in September, and stung by Tulloch's criticisms, it confirmed Bell's fears by deciding to re-advertise, only to have the advertisement declared invalid on a legal technicality. Its delaying tactics

would place Thring under as much financial pressure as it could achieve.

As the initial exhilaration of being at Borth wore off, Thring's moods returned to alternating euphoria and gloom. He wrote to his brother Godfrey that he was glad to have escaped: 'I have not had, as at Uppingham for so many years, to sit like Job, scraping boils on a dunghill', but he could not ignore all the pressures mounting on him. A decision would soon be required about the school's location for the autumn term.

He was also very aware that his debts were increasing. This was despite a fighting fund initiated by Captain Withington. Circulars had been sent to every parent and the fund was publicised nationally in *The Times* on 21 April following a letter from *A Parent*. *The Aberystwyth Observer* picked up the story and the *Stamford Mercury* reported that £200 was raised in the first week, but it would not be enough. Thring confided to his diary on 26 May: 'My bank books came this morning: a heavy weight there'.

He again felt powerless: 'It has suited the [RSA] to represent us as hostile, but it would be difficult for them to show [this]. When a great wrong is done by people in power, they are always lavish in their accusations. My answer is: Why are we at Borth if we are powerful or pugnacious? People are not turned out of house and home and brought face to face with ruin for their own amusement'.

He also dreaded having to re-engage with the trustees, having clashed so much with them in the past and holding them in such low esteem. There had been minimal contact from them since he left Uppingham: none of them had visited Borth (nor would do so, apart from Birley and Jacob, who had come down briefly to see their sons), so any knowledge they had of the school's situation would be largely second-hand.

However, they were his employers, and he grew very anxious on hearing that they planned a special meeting for 17 June. He wrote to Birley: 'Bear in mind that a *fiat* of the trustees for return without an affirmation of safety means the break-up of the present school. If they order [it], the order will not be obeyed [and] a large number of masters will stand by me... It is strange sitting here and waiting quietly for one's doom, and at such hands'.

All through June he had been testing the masters' support for a possible second term away. Initially he had so much opposition that 'to hold on in Borth was impossible', but he worked on them, telling them that if they returned home they would have lost 'almost all the advantage that we had gained by our daring move'. It would be 'unconditional surrender' and therefore unthinkable. He felt 'things tend more and more to a final breaking away from Uppingham' and he (and at least one housemaster) spoke of re-founding the school elsewhere.

Whether or not Barnard Smith and Wales knew all this, some trustees appear to have become aware of it. At their meeting in Thring's absence they confirmed his worst fears by declining to seek medical advice about the latest state of the town and summarily ordering him to return with the school to Uppingham in September.

He rued the lack of support from some of his colleagues, fearing it would give the trustees the pretext to dismiss him. However, the trustees' stance back-fired. Faced with such high-handedness from men remote from their situation, the housemasters belatedly rallied, agreeing that a second term in Borth was inevitable.

Thring told them: 'This should have been [their] opinion six weeks ago', but a direct confrontation proved unnecessary when Dr Bell wrote on 1 July that there were fresh typhoid cases in the town: 'As I knew you had to give an answer to your (hotel)

landlord at the end of this month, I thought it best to drop a line... I fear it must decide you to stop away for next term, I cannot see how you can come back’.

Bell’s advice was quickly backed up by the LGB, which reacted to Major Tulloch’s blistering report by stating that on no account should the school return before Christmas. When the trustees met on 14 July, they had no alternative but to reconsider their summons: a move communicated to Thring by telegram.

Their *volte-face* was expressed in face-saving terms, later repeated in the trustees’ minute book: ‘In [their] opinion there is nothing in the present condition of Uppingham to cause them to rescind their resolution of the 17th ult., yet having regard to a memorial [from] the whole body of assistant masters they are willing... that the school remain in Borth for the autumn term’.

Thring drew wry amusement from their tone: ‘It is fun to see what a sour face they make over it, and are foolish enough to show that they make’. At least they granted £500 (in advance of the next term’s fees) to keep him financially afloat.

A few days later on ‘a glorious day, bright and hot’, term ended and the boys departed by train - but not before Thring had told them ‘to come back [in September] with the soldier spirit to face whatever remained’.

He surely knew that a second term would have none of the novelty of the first. Spring and summer, with so many possibilities out of doors, had been pleasurable, even exciting, but an autumn term with shortening days and increasing wind and rain would be very different. Birley wrote to Bell from Borth on 7 June: ‘The place is glorious now, but I do not think it tenable in winter in its present condition... [but] you need not tell the rector’.

Meanwhile, there was a by-product for Borth of the school’s presence. If typhoid could spread, so could an enthusiasm for public health reform. Learning from the school’s arrival in Borth, local people had become concerned about their own lack of mains water, and during the summer a public meeting took place at which there were many complaints about smells and other dangers. If Borth’s RSA could not, or would not, provide mains water, other means must be found.

Similar demands were made by Aberystwyth residents for their own town at a meeting a month later, and the *Cambrian News* mused: ‘How watering places can expect to flourish, as long as visitors are unable to obtain even scanty supplies of doubtful water, is a mystery’. By then the masters had gone their separate ways for the summer, so Thring, on holiday at his usual retreat on Grasmere in the Lake District, was not there to witness the protests, but it seems likely that their irony was not lost on him.

Christian (of Redgate) spent much of his summer in Uppingham, handling matters with Bell on Thring’s behalf, with Birley and Jacob giving advice from afar as necessary.

Bell relieved his frustration by reviving his long dispute with Haviland. When he reported cases of typhoid amongst his town patients to the RSA on 1 July, it immediately informed the LGB. Haviland was sent to investigate, and claimed: ‘I proceeded to the premises where I met Mr Bell and requested him to accompany me... He however refused to do so and dared me to enter the premises... Having been thus impeded in the execution of my duty, I left... and I report the fact, asking how I [should] act under the circumstances?’

Bell countered immediately, again demanding that the LGB confirm that Haviland had no power to enter any house



without the agreement of its occupier. The RSA, in a difficult position now that Bell was one of its members, supported the need for an LGB ruling, and it replied that Haviland had no such power.

Three days later, Bell wrote to the LGB again, pointing out that, under the 1875 Public Health Act, MOHs were required to look into causes of disease outbreaks as a whole, but not into individual cases. He added that he had kept Haviland fully informed about the latest cases, despite the MOH's failure to apologise for earlier incidents between them. A reply from the ever-cautious LGB suggested that it should not interfere in what it was a matter of professional etiquette rather than law, but it upheld Bell's view of the legal position.

Bell replied, justifying himself again at length. It was insulting for Haviland to talk about 'a *supposed* case of typhoid fever'. Infuriated at Bell's persistence despite being an RSA member himself, the LGB considered whether 'to advise Mr Bell of his social responsibilities', but decided eventually that 'the safe course is merely to acknowledge it'.

Unabashed, Bell dug deeper, finding that Haviland had failed to send in annual reports and illness and mortality returns for either 1874 or 1875, and writing sarcastically: 'If the LGB stand for their official (i.e. Haviland) leaving their letters unanswered, they will stand for anything'.

The letter went on to question the RSA's every decision. What were its motives in allowing further delay? Was there not a risk that, with the project so delayed, only small contractors would tender for the work? As a result, might the work be poorly done? Why had the RSA resented the LGB's insistence on open competition? Why was it opposed to incentives for the work being completed on time?

Thriving on all the contentiousness, Bell also wrote to Thring that Haviland had no

right to go on objecting to the proposed flushing arrangements for the sewer system (his action being ostensibly on the grounds that the water company was not yet in a position to guarantee enough water to make them work). Thring, still on holiday, appears not to have responded.

The RSA meanwhile became involved in a dispute with the LGB over the terms of its new loan. The Treasury, alarmed by the sums being requested by sanitary authorities from across the country, was pressing through the PWLB for an increase in all but the most extreme cases of the standard interest rate of 3.5% on loans.

Major Tulloch's recent recommendation reflected this new policy, but the RSA pleaded that it was indeed a special case, and that the 3.5% rate already agreed should stand. The LGB agreed to support this but warned the RSA that it had no power to overrule the PWLB, if it vetoed this. As a sop to the PWLB, it insisted on a repayment period of only 30 years rather than the 50 which the RSA wished for. The ratepayers would have to foot the increased cost.

As the day for opening the sewerage tenders drew near, Bell became anxious. He wrote again to the LGB: the weeks were slipping by; the weather would soon deteriorate, and construction work would be more difficult. He hoped the LGB would force the pace, implying that it lacked the will rather than any legal power to do so. Ever mindful of others' business, he also proposed that Jacob visit the PWLB to lobby for a rapid decision on the loan, and that Field attend the opening of tenders to add engineering expertise even if Barnard Smith opposed it.

Bell's main fear was that if the company could not rapidly guarantee enough water for flushing, Barnard Smith would use this as a pretext to delay all sewerage works until the waterworks was complete. This

was possibly a year away: 'I said to [Barnard Smith] you cannot put off the works until that time. Oh yes, he said, we can, if Mr Field and Mr Haviland tell us they ought not to be done'. Bell concluded: 'Barnard Smith does not want to open the tender in that case'. He was convinced that the RSA was determined 'to make Mr Thring submit to them'.

He considered whether the ratepayers could be goaded into protesting, or even if the LGB should be encouraged to seek special parliamentary powers to act with 'energy and firmness'. At the same time he revealed that he could not shake off his fury at Haviland's reappointment as MOH.

Thring shared Bell's pessimism, writing to Christian from the Lake District on 9 August: 'How I hate the whole subject... The rector has written a specious letter [in which] he lets out that since Sir C Adderley and I have failed to bring them (the RSA) to book with the LGB, no other power can'. He hoped Adderley would fight on, but it was not for him (i.e. Thring) and the masters to get involved in the RSA's interest rate demands. If the town would not admit its errors, there was little he could do.

On 13 August Bell accused the RSA of putting out false information about the increased burden on the rates which would result from the sanitary works, which he saw as a smokescreen to hide the costs of its earlier opposition to improvements.

To Bell, every delay and every problem was a conspiracy rather than the result of procedure, bureaucracy, accident or, incompetence - even the slowness of the final decision from London over the PWLB loan: 'I do not think that the LGB Inspector was here accidentally: Barnard Smith knows more about that than he cares to tell'.

More positively, he had kept up the pressure on Thring's opponents almost

single-handedly through the summer months until the time when some of Thring's most influential masters now re-joined the campaigning.

William Earle, the longest-standing member of the staff by some years, wrote three letters on 14 August. First, writing as 'the Second Master' he urged the LGB to compel the RSA to complete the sewerage work by November. He emphasised that he wrote not only for the school but on behalf of leading ratepayers in the town, a community in which he had lived for much of his life.

Again the LGB stood back, referring the request to the RSA, which responded on 28 August. Progress on Earle's concerns could be expected very soon (it claimed) because the new bye-laws had been agreed and adopted, and a tender for the sewerage work was about to be accepted, subject to satisfactory references. It assured him that it wanted no further delays.

Earle also wrote to Wales. Their friendship went back for nearly two decades, and he hoped it would survive all these controversies: 'I can hardly tell you how distressed I am that the [LGB] are again going to postpone the drainage; I simply cannot believe [it]. I hope that you will let your disapproval be publicly known. It will endanger the peace of Uppingham in our time. I beg you as one who has been and who still desires to be your friend... to do all you can'. No reply has survived.

Finally Earle wrote to Gainsborough, Adderley and a third powerful trustee that 'no time should be lost'. He suggested that a large deputation of ratepayers should be encouraged go to the LGB. He would gladly join it.

Christian had told Earle that the prospect of further delay was 'disgusting and really alarming... the time has come for a more distinctly aggressive policy on our part'. He thought that as all the magistrates could

sit on the RSA *ex officio*, they too should be contacted to apply their own pressure.

Mullins, on holiday in Somerset, agreed: 'The intelligence you give is disgusting and really alarming. [No] time should be lost in having a petition to the LGB prepared.... the time has come for a more distinctly aggressive policy on our part'.

He favoured seeking support from other local clergymen because ratepayers 'might rally to a leader who was not afraid of Barnard Smith or the rector... I will willingly find £5 (or if necessary £10) towards good legal advice. At any rate that Haviland's power to interfere should be questioned'.

Christian sprang into action. On 11 August he too wrote to Adderley, begging him to put down further parliamentary questions. Adderley responded that it was 'inconceivable that men should act thus' and asked Christian to discover whether any MPs had sons at the school. Just three days later, in response to a backbench question, Sclater-Booth denied any link between the school's postponed return and the delayed drainage works. He surely cannot have believed this, but may have thought it counter-productive for the RSA to be publicly shamed any further.

Christian also wrote to the PWLB on 16 August requesting a speedy verdict on the loan question and its interest rate. He was assured that a decision was imminent, but Birley and Jacob told him that the LGB should be contacted immediately if there was any more delay. Thring, who had interrupted his Lakeland holiday for a further meeting in Manchester with Birley and Jacob, wrote appreciatively to Christian: 'I am so sorry you have all this worry'.

Thring believed that the school had now done all it could and that it was now up to the ratepayers to assert themselves: 'The utter want of business acuteness makes

one laugh... clever men would not bungle so much in conducting their own case... The crisis seems to have come, but I cannot think that the school [and I] should be dragged through the mire of a street fight with the rector'.

Birley agreed: 'If the inhabitants of Uppingham care for the school to return, they must assert themselves as they have never done yet. Parents here [in Manchester are] very little inclined to lend any help - they argue that if Uppingham does not care for the school, it need not have it - and that it would be much better if Mr Thring would leave the place and set up his flag elsewhere'.

The 'crisis' to which Thring referred was a demand by local residents (four months after their earlier approach) that Barnard Smith should meet a ratepayers' deputation. A group representing 75 other townspeople had drawn up a resolution which pulled no punches:

'Our interests will be seriously damaged by any further delay [adding] to [our] pecuniary loss, inconvenience, and suffering... it will imperil the existence of the school and prove a deep and lasting injury to the ratepayers and owners of property...'

The deputation was led by John Hawthorn, the printer and bookshop owner, who must have felt the school's absence as keenly as anyone. One of his principal supporters was William Compton who had led the call for town improvements right back in 1857. Most of the traders were chapel-goers but Compton was one of Wales' churchwardens and a prominent benefactor to the parish church: better-placed than anyone to call the rector to order. His patience had run finally out.

The meeting took place on 13 August. Bell reported to Thring that when Barnard Smith confirmed that the RSA had dropped its objections to the water

company, 'the deputation expressed themselves perfectly satisfied [but] then the rector [Wales] allowed his temper to get the better of his judgement, and said, attacking Mr Hawthorn, that they were not to suppose their [resolution] had made the least difference to their decision...

... He was going on in this strain when Compton said: "Come Mr Wales, don't spoil it, we are all harmonious now", and others joined in so the rector shut up, contenting himself with telling Mr Hawthorn, 'that he hoped now he would use his best influence to bring about a more charitable and peaceful feeling in the parish'. Hawthorn replied "he should leave that, to someone more influential than himself" and that the memorial was too fully signed to please the rector and his friends'.

The deputation successfully demanded that a second meeting take place a week later, and threatened that if there was then no progress it would contact the LGB. Bell told Jacob that he feared Wales and others might make trouble for some of its leading figures (perhaps those whose landlord was the church).

In fact, with the RSA in disarray, Field back-tracked from questioning the water company's ability to service the sewer flushing: a change of heart which did much to neutralise Haviland's continuing hostility to its drilling operation.

Three days later (16 August) seven tenders for sewerage improvements were opened, the lowest coming from a Mr Smart of Northampton. Field agreed to examine them without delay. Bell anticipated that Smart's tender would be accepted but he did not trust the RSA to move quickly to take up Smart's references, so he did this himself ahead of the next RSA meeting.

The references proved satisfactory, and the tender was accepted on 23 August, four

days after another angry meeting at which ratepayers protested against all the delays and Wales again lost his temper. Meanwhile confirmation arrived of the loan and its 3.5% interest rate, and the LGB ordered a rapid start to the work.

Thring had little sympathy for Barnard Smith, but he saw Wales as the real villain:

'The rector is just like a naughty little boy crying "I don't care, I don't care!" when put in a corner. I am sick of his cant about "controversy" and "our not joining them"... We have now entered on the last scene of the curious drama...

Nothing surprises me in the rector; he has clearly got out of his depth, and his nose full of water, and [he] may splash about a good deal'. He hoped that any masters spending the summer in Uppingham and chancing to encounter Wales would treat him with 'cool civility'.

Some of the moderates on the RSA were now keen to make peace with the school: the busy harvest time was imminent. A leading farmer, Edward Wortley of Ridlington, contacted Christian (still in Uppingham) on 17 August. Wortley claimed not to have been fully aware of recent events, and he asserted that some of the delays had been 'partly legal and unavoidable hitherto', but he believed 'now to defer or not to urge on with all speed would be childish and cruel'.

It was a welcome gesture. Earle wrote to Christian on 19 August: 'All will I trust now go smoothly and oh! For the return of peace and happy days'.

Despite his optimism the timescale for the school's return was still far from clear. Moreover, the animosity between school and RSA, headmaster and trustees, Bell and Haviland, even the RSA and the LGB, remained deep - and any attempts to build bridges were still very fragile.

**UPPINGHAM**  
**WATERWORKS**  
COMPANY.  
(39 & 40 Vic. Session, 1876.)

**NOTICE.**

THE Directors of this Company are now proceeding with the construction of the Waterworks and the laying of the Main Pipes throughout the Town, for the supply of such of the Inhabitants of Uppingham as are willing to be consumers of Water, at the Rates and Charges authorized by their Act of Parliament.

Consumers' Service Pipes applied for during the construction of the Works will be laid down, FREE OF CHARGE, from the Mains up to the Houses or Boundary Wall of property to be supplied with Water; the Owner or Occupier will at his own expense supply and maintain all pipes and other appendages within his premises.

Intending Consumers are requested to apply to the Secretary for Forms of Application for the Supply of Water, and that the Service Pipes may be laid up to their premises.

*By order of the Directors,*  
**JOHN HAWTHORN,**  
SECRETARY.

WATERWORKS, UPPINGHAM,  
7th December, 1876.  
BATHURST, CHURCH, UPPINGHAM.

Advertisement for the Water Company, 1876.

CAMBRIAN HOTEL, BORTH,  
R.S.O., WALES,  
*December 26th, 1876.*

THE important question whether the School should return to Uppingham after Christmas has been decided on the best authority.

Dr. Acland, F.R.S., Regius Professor, Oxford, and President of the Medical Council, visited Uppingham last week, and inspected the state of the Town, and decided that it was not safe yet for the School to go back.

He says that more time is required, and that the works must have been in operation before the Town will be secure.

These conditions will we trust be fulfilled by Easter. In the mean time the Trustees have sanctioned arrangements for our spending the next Term at Borth.

The mild climate of Borth, and the many appliances both for work and play that our prolonged stay at Borth has enabled us to furnish, render this very practicable. The efficiency of the School will in no way suffer. The School therefore will reassemble at Borth on *Friday, January 19th.*

EDWARD THRING,  
HEAD-MASTER.

Notice sent by Thring in December 1876 to the parents of all the boys at Borth, announcing a third term there.

### Extract from unpublished recollections of Alice M. Bell

She was the wife of Dr Thomas Bell, the school's MO. Many years after the event, she described how the voting papers for the RSA elections were conveyed to Borth and back.

Mr C White caught the only train that would get the voting papers to Borth in time. Only slow trains stopped at Borth, so

Mr C. White was travelling all through the night.

Arrived at Borth Station in the early morning he found Mr Thring

and all the Masters on the Platform. Tables and presses and ink

were there, and all the voting papers were filled in, while Mr White

had breakfast prepared for him in a waiting room. Mr Thring

had sent the breakfast down, & was herself on the platform to give

him good wishes. In less than an hour the slow train to Rugby

came up, & Mr White had to begin the crawl back. He found

woodcock & the horses at Rugby all refreshed by the night's

rest, and "he galloped and trotted them" back to Lippinham to

get the voting papers in. in time. They got in with 15 minutes

to spare. There was a complete change round of Guardians

Mr Thring's chief Supporters were all returned, and his

## CHAPTER 8: AUTUMN 1876 - SPRING 1877

Any fragile truce between the various warring parties was soon tested once again in the columns of the national press. *Paterfamilias* returned to the attack in *The Times* on 28 August. Reminding readers of all the past events, he stated that there was still no guarantee that the school would be able to return, even after Christmas. The school had carried out all the experts' suggestions, but while the RSA had accepted Field's plans for town improvements, 'no effectual effort has been made to carry them out'.

There needed to be 'more activity displayed in remedying the original evil [and] an end to mischievous and harmful delay'. Criticising the trustees as supine and drawing heavily on classical analogy, he described 'the spectacle of a great school under a man of originality and power... driven from their rightful home to an obscure welsh village (*sic*) at the extremity of the land, leaving their fields and beautiful Temple to lie desolate'.

Bell wrote to Jacob that this had 'acted like a blister, and some of the [RSA] were very unhappy about the lies it contained', but they would not reply because 'while the school can get fair space allowed in the *Times* for anything they have to say, they (the RSA) would have their letter mutilated and pushed into a corner'.

On 1 September *an old inhabitant* rebutted all the claims of *Paterfamilias*, listing the low number of deaths in recent months, which (he said) showed that the town really was healthy and that the RSA had been far from inactive. Reviving the old controversy about Thring changing the school for the worse, he declared that it 'was founded for the benefit of town and district... *Paterfamilias* and other parents take advantage of our charity and send their sons to reap the benefits, and are the first to raise an unjust cry against the town'.

He detailed what the RSA had spent in recent years and the impact of this expenditure on local rates, prophesying further big rises which would be borne only by local townspeople while '*Paterfamilias* pays nothing towards the expenses that he so loudly calls for'. He criticised the school for having failed so far to provide a water supply 'from want of capital, energy or proper advice'.

In Borth, term began on 15 September with one immediate priority for the masters: the battening down of the hatches before winter set in. The expense of this worried them, and it could only be partially offset from Captain Withington's fighting fund. They were alarmed too on 26 October by seven cases of scarlet fever amongst the boys. Childs imposed stringent isolation and the outbreak was over in ten days, but *The Lancet* seized the opportunity to assert that Thring could not blame the RSA this time, and that the school's health arrangements were very poor compared with Marlborough College.

Thring still hoped for a return to Uppingham by Christmas, based on the news that sewerage work there had begun at last. He was reassured that the Lower School (still *in situ*) had experienced no problems since Tarbotton's improvements nine months earlier. As the weeks went by, however, typhoid reappeared in the town and the date of the school's return was again put back as the works proceeded disappointingly slowly. Only with their completion could it contemplate leaving Borth: surely by the spring.

Bell continued his many campaigns to unmask plots and incompetence. He believed *An old inhabitant* was a former RSA member voted off earlier in the year: 'It is a great pity that they do not stick to the truth. They are like the ostrich; they cannot see their deficiencies and believe everyone else is blind'.

He again complained to the LGB about the RSA: he would cooperate with it unless it tried to exceed its powers, but he also blamed the latest rate rise solely on the disputes it had precipitated. He feared it might aim for further delays in the drainage work to phase its escalating costs. His disputes with Haviland still rankled, but he would not risk further trouble by reporting another typhoid case in the town on 19 September: 'One asks: What is the use of a medical officer?'

The *Stamford Mercury* reported on 22 September that Smart had begun laying the drains, but even now things did not go completely according to plan: 'On Monday evening, as Mr Holman of Bisbrooke was returning from Leicester, one of the holes being left unprotected, the horse got in and injured itself severely, breaking the harness. Fortunately the occupants of the cart escaped unhurt. On Tuesday evening, Mr Askew went to look at the place where the horse slipped in, and by some means he got in and sustained serious injury'.

In early October deep digging proved much harder and more protracted than had been anticipated, and on 29 November Smart applied to the RSA for extra time - which Bell blamed not on Smart but on 'miscalculations and blunder' in the RSA's tendering. He wrote to Thring about four more typhoid cases among his own patients and rumours of others.

Thring recorded in his diary: 'We hear that the drain work has brought some fearful revelations, and that [Barnard Smith] has had to come and see to it, as the workmen refused to keep on the whole day. I grieve that there is more typhoid [in the workhouse]... The popular feeling at Uppingham, if not [already] stirred up, must gradually find out that we have been most patient...'

Meanwhile Bell had discovered a new cause to take up. He alerted the RSA to longstanding drainage problems at the

national (town) school, of which Wales was chairman, and claimed that this had triggered a rare dispute between the two leading figures on the RSA:

'[Barnard Smith] and two or three others appeared glad to have had the matter brought before them... they have been [on] at the rector about it before, and he has always asked for time, pleaded that they (the school) had no funds, that the [RSA] ought to help and that the gradients were unsuitable etc etc, all to delay... Mr Wales does as he likes in the management of [the school's] affairs'.

Bell did not let the matter drop, forcing the board of school managers to get estimates for improvements, and demanding resignations if nothing was done. After the RSA meeting on 1 December where Wales again pleaded a shortage of funds, Bell threatened to form an alternative board to overthrow the existing managers. He asked Thring whether the masters might pay the legal costs of such a move: arguably an insensitive request, given all the other financial pressures on them.

Alternatively, as Bell did not wish to become a manager himself, he asked whether perhaps the masters would put one of themselves up for election to the existing board? He thought Wales might actually favour this if his old friend Earle would consider standing, but Earle initially put conditions on the proposal which the other managers urged Wales to reject. We do not know the details, but Bell recognised that Earle's 'extreme intimacy with the rector' might place him in a difficult position and he then suggested several other masters.

Ultimately, Earle relented and was elected. The national school's drainage issue dragged on for some months before a new dry-earth closet system with regular treatments was put in place, although some managers felt that it was not a good long-term solution.



Encouraged by the RSA's embarrassments over the national school, another housemaster wrote to Bell suggesting that he raise similar questions about sanitation at the workhouse. Like the sanatorium, whose cesspits Haviland had criticised so strongly, it was very near the intended site of the new water supply to which the MOH was also vociferously opposed. It would not look good for the RSA to have criticised the sanatorium, if simultaneously it had ignored or kept secret the state of pits at its own workhouse only a few hundred yards away.

Bell seized on the issue with alacrity, but the evasive Barnard Smith 'could not say' what state the workhouse pits were in, nor whether they were all to be connected to the sewers; he promised that he would raise it with the master of the workhouse when they next met. He may have hoped Bell would lose sight of the issue, now that there were new typhoid cases in the town but, unfortunately for him, Haviland suddenly intervened again on 12 December with a memo to the RSA which it duly sent on to the LGB.

Haviland seems to have had no prior knowledge of the workhouse issue, but he again complained bitterly about the small distance between the sanatorium pits and the water company's site. The old pits had not been removed, and the water company's new well did not go deep enough. He went back over all the scarlet fever cases earlier in the decade. Unless an alternative site for the water source was found, he would not answer for the consequences.

Whatever his reason for reviving these issues, Haviland's intervention stoked the fires of the workhouse dispute. Bell again called for its pits to be abolished, arguing that there was already a well there which could service new water closets. However, Barnard Smith, supported by Wales, was fiercely opposed to spending yet more ratepayers' money. He did not see 'why

we should go to the expense of filling our cesspits to please the water company'.

Despite warning his fellow RSA members that they risked being accused of double standards, Bell received little support. Legally he could not make them act, although Barnard Smith was forced to let the issue be debated, and the *Stamford Mercury*, supported by *A guardian* in *The Lancet*, predicted (correctly) that the pits would eventually be removed, once the new water supply was complete.

The water company's progress was mixed. Construction work was gathering pace near the sanatorium and the first shares had been taken up. Thring and several masters subscribed, but demand was low amongst townspeople, partly because of resentment at a school-led enterprise, but also because they were now feeling the full financial effects of the school's absence.

Thring was unsympathetic: 'I do not understand the people of Uppingham. I fear I never shall. How people with property in the town can calmly run the risk of seeing it destroyed in value for want of drainage and water supply, and how people with hearts can be indifferent to the illness and death of their neighbours, is beyond me'. He was concerned to have allies on the company's board, because the RSA was now using the letters' column of *The Times* for a dispute with solicitors for the company, who had objected to remarks from *An old inhabitant* which stated that the company was a ploy by the school to thwart the RSA's own attempts to provide better water.

The solicitors fiercely rebutted this allegation, reminding readers of the paper that Thring's venture had been publicly supported at a large gathering of townspeople. Every effort had been made to address the RSA's concerns, but its insistence that no street should be dug up without its consent would 'have rendered the [company] a dead letter'. The slow

progress was due not to any 'want of energy' from the company, but to the RSA's expensive attempts to thwart the legislation needed to set it up. Bell repeated many of these points to anyone within the town who would listen.

Growing concern by late autumn about the ever-slipping timetable of Smart's sewerage work, and the news of the re-emergence of typhoid, prompted Thring to inform the LGB on 5 December that the school would probably be unable to return to Uppingham at New Year. He over-reached himself in suggesting the name of an independent doctor who might inspect progress on the LGB's behalf: the irritated LGB replied that the school must decide its affairs for itself.

For Hodgkinson, whose Lower School recruitment had been hard-hit, it was 'very disastrous to me that the school [is] not returning'. The reaction was even gloomier in Borth. Thring was secretly resigned to another term there, but although he was necessarily upbeat with the boys, morale among the masters was very low. Many of them wanted to spend Christmas in Uppingham, and they left Borth as soon as term ended, even before any decision had been made about the following term. Maybe Thring was wise to reveal nothing of his post-Christmas plans until pupils and staff had gone.

On one issue Bell in Uppingham and Childs in Borth were united. It might anger the RSA if Thring brought in another expert to advise on whether it was safe for the school to return, but he must do it. As a result, Professor Acland, Regius Professor of Medicine at Oxford and a member of the 1870 sanitary commission, visited Uppingham on 18 December. Armed with the reports by Haviland and Rawlinson, he toured both town and school very thoroughly, meeting formally with Bell, Childs, Tarbotton and two housemasters, and calling on Hodgkinson and Wales. Haviland later visited him in Oxford.

Acland was emphatic that the school should not return in January. Jacob rushed down from Liverpool anticipating that Thring would need support against the trustees, who met on 22 December, again in the headmaster's absence. They reluctantly accepted Acland's advice, but decided that they could come to no final settlement of the year's accounts until Thring sent them more details. They did, however, vote a further £300 to pay the masters' salaries and £250 to Thring towards his expenses.

A potential sting in the tail was the instruction to him to draw up a statement 'showing in detail the value of the property belonging to the masters conjointly and separately for which they consider themselves to be entitled to be indemnified under the [governance) Scheme'. They were at last starting to consider the school's future financial structure - and maybe the implications for the time when Thring might eventually step down.

Only two days earlier Thring had written to Christian, who had returned to Uppingham to take part in Acland's fact-finding. He was grateful, but he could not hide his weariness and dejection. Several housemasters still in Borth were disputing financial matters:

'I am glad that you are cheered. I should be if I were not so tired, and worried... I shall want (need) a secretary for the next three months and a lawyer at the end. My letters are such a heap... I write from 10 to 1 daily without stopping, and the inside of my head feels as if I was growing a fleece there. [If only] I could think that there really is a break in the clouds, and some glimpses of light under them'.

Even on Boxing Day he was at work in Borth, writing to the parents to announce another term there and assuring them that the efficiency of the school would not suffer.

The end of the old year brought a dramatic twist. Barnard Smith missed the RSA meeting on 27 December – something almost unprecedented. He died of typhoid two days later. Maybe eighteen months of worry and dispute had weakened his resistance medically: his dogged opposition to abolishing the workhouse cesspits suggests an exhausted man.

Even in an age accustomed to sudden death, his passing caused deep shock, not only in Uppingham but when the news reached Borth on New Year's Day. Thring's reaction was regretful but unyielding: 'The sad and fearful news reached us that Barnard Smith has died of typhoid fever - apoplexy the immediate cause. Poor fellow! He has fallen a victim to his own obstinacy and delusions'. In a letter to Bell he went further: 'It is fearful to be suddenly taken away whilst doing wrong. God help us all'.

The members of the RSA gathered on 3 January 1877 and formally recorded the 'unexpected and deeply lamented death of the Reverend Barnard Smith', noting 'their strong and grateful sense of the services he has rendered'. The *Stamford Mercury* described him as 'a staunch friend to educational pursuits... he devoted his talents and experience for the benefit of the ratepayers. There was not a charity or institution within the neighbourhood of which he was not an active member. His loss will not fully be recognized until time shows the actual value'.

However, with Barnard Smith gone, there was an opportunity for a fresh start. Recognising how demanding his role had become, the guardians now separated the chairmanship of the Union (the guardians as a whole) from that of the RSA. Wortley, who had written in such conciliatory tones earlier, took the former role. Bell approved of this, but was still determined to pursue the issue of the workhouse cesspits.

He demanded to know what legal powers the guardians had, or needed, to make structural alterations and how these might be paid for. In less troubled times the RSA members might have tried to block what implied more work, expense and engagement with the LGB but, shocked by Barnard Smith's sudden death, they asked Field to draw up the necessary designs. Copies were sent to Haviland and to Dr Walford (who was MO of the workhouse).

Predictably, this produced a new burst of acrimony - this time between Haviland and Walford. Walford supported Bell's call for the workhouse to be given water closets linked to the new sewerage system. Haviland, a convinced advocate of dry-earth arrangements everywhere, argued that they would be the best solution. He reiterated that the water pressure might not be adequate for water closets because the workhouse was on some of the highest ground in the entire town. Wortley, whose own property had used a dry-earth system successfully for many years, agreed.

Bell could not resist sniping at Haviland: 'It is extraordinary that [he] never found out [when writing his notorious report a year earlier] that there were cesspits at the union... If he knew of them he kept them very dark, and I think his opposition arose from his annoyance at my having brought them to light'.

The uncertain RSA members appealed to Field for guidance. The LGB was keen to avoid being drawn in; it had kept out of the dispute about the sanatorium cesspits and the new water station, and it considered that it was far too late to start querying the company's arrangements.

Eventually Haviland's view prevailed, a decision confirmed by the RSA on 21 February. The workhouse inhabitants were not to receive the same new facilities as the rest of the town.

Haviland again attacked the site of the new water supply, but, like the LGB, the RSA decided that the time for opposition was past. The company's share capital had been fully subscribed, construction was well advanced, and pipes had been laid along every street. Bell reported to Thring that 'the flushing cart has arrived, and the sewers are being swept out... the health of the town is good, very little illness indeed'. He had recently seen two child cases of typhoid caused (he believed) by polluted wells, but these wells could be closed off when mains water started to flow.

Meanwhile storms at the start of the new term in Borth had given the school further experience of the realities of Atlantic coastal life, and a longing to return home. It would be important for Thring to continue having supporters within the RSA. The next spring elections were not far away, and while it was unlikely that the masters would have to vote from Borth a second time, Bell considered that 'the animosity is not dead, Haviland has been showing his teeth, and the [RSA] will back him the moment the year of grace (for the company to complete its work) expires: at present they feel powerless to do it any serious damage'. Worried that Wales might try to find new candidates whom he could manipulate, Bell wrote to Thring several times asking whether a housemaster might stand.

He even tried to persuade Thring to throw his own hat into the ring: a tempting prospect, but one which, in the final days at Borth, was a battle too far, even for Thring. In what was almost his final letter from Borth, he urged Bell himself to stand again: 'I heard what an astonishing exhibition the rector made of himself at [a recent] meeting. This last year has taken him quite out of his depth... But I could not bring myself to challenging direct comparison with the Rector. He is no antagonist for me'. Bell (together with Pateman, the school's second choice candidate) was elected.

Bell had one personal issue to revive. Word had filtered back more than once from Borth about the excellent Dr Childs - culminating in local people there giving him a hero's farewell. Bell was concerned that Childs should not be allowed any medical role in the school once it returned, lest it threaten his own position. He suggested that Childs would not have the time to do both teaching and doctoring, and he reminded Thring of a promise, made back in the dark days of autumn 1875, that Childs was being taken on only as a science master.

Childs, however, was resolved to continue practising medicine in some form, and claimed that Thring had proposed that each housemaster should choose between the two of them. Bell feared that if this were allowed to happen, it would be the prelude to Childs resigning from the staff and starting a GP practice of his own. He also feared that Childs planned to publish a report on the typhoid outbreak (which Childs denied), which might possibly support the earlier criticisms of Bell's actions.

Bell claimed to be 'in doubt as to whether he should trouble Mr Thring' about these issues, but it seems clear that he hoped others 'would do the troubling for him'. Unsuccessful in this, he eventually wrote to Thring himself, but he need not have worried. Thring confirmed that Bell would have his support as the school's sole MO.

By now, the trustees had approved the school's return, but they were again in dispute with Thring over his expenses claim, and insisting for the future on clearer advance budgeting and no exceptional spending without prior permission. They were determined to tighten their financial grip on him.

The return would not be a moment too soon. In different ways it had been a hard winter for both town and school. There appear to have been few businesses

bankrupted during the school's absence, but the economic downturn had been marked. The *Stamford Mercury* described the March Spring Fair: 'This year, despite the usual accompaniment of steam-horses, swing boats and rifle galleries etc... not much business was done'. A week or two later, however, the paper confirmed that the school's return was fixed for 6 May. The works were complete; water was flowing and the new drains were in place.

The school remained in session in Borth over Easter 1877. After a farewell concert in Aberystwyth, and a lengthy, effusive farewell celebration in Borth at which almost the entire village turned out, the pupils left. 'And so the grand page of life is turned,' wrote Thring on 13 April, 'the chapter come to an end. But it has been glorious'.

He returned to Uppingham on 24 April 1877 'with wonderfully mixed feelings... thankfulness to God for a page turned and closed; intense dislike of the place, mixed with a feeling of home and being master once more in my own house; the old constriction of stomach and feeling of dread, mixed with a sense of no longer being at the mercy of others and subject to the racket and disturbance of hotel life'.

Messages of congratulations poured in. They included one from a fellow-headmaster: 'Your exodus was one of the bravest exploits ever performed, and you deserve to be hung all over with Victoria crosses'. A week later he noted: that 'the town is really making a grand demonstration: arches and flags all up in the street: they must have taken much time and care and spent much money. This... is a new start in life here... a signal refutation of the calumnies vented on us last year, and the whole moral atmosphere of the place will no doubt be changed'.

There were banners and evergreen triumphal arches: 'Welcome home', 'Flourish School: Flourish Town' and

'Uppingham School: a good name lives for ever'. These heralded two evenings of triumphant processions after the pupils returned: 'The whole town was in a wonderful fervour of enthusiasm'.

The *Stamford Mercury* praised Thring's 'determined efforts', and described how flags were hung from houses with so many streamers and so much bunting 'that it would have done honour to a royal visit to a town four times as large as Uppingham. There was scarcely a house which did not contribute its quota towards the gaiety of the scene'.

Mr White, the doughty carrier of the voting slips to Borth a year earlier, displayed large welcoming notices outside his ironmonger's shop in the High Street. Dr Bell's surgery was bedecked with Chinese lanterns. When the bus from Seaton arrived, its horses were detached and pupils dragged it around the town. Bands played; many cheers were given. The only sour note was sounded by Wales, who declined to have the church bells rung - possibly out of pique that Thring had just been elected to replace him as president of the town's Mutual Improvement Society. In the end, even he sensed the mood and changed his decision.

Three days later at a ceremony at the school, speeches of welcome were given by Bell and by John Hawthorn, who had played a major role in the ratepayers' summer revolt and who observed that 'the absence of the school had pressed with severity on many tradesmen'. Thring was presented with an illuminated address, and replied at length, reiterating that 'we are united now as never before' and observing that, with the new term's intake of pupils in addition to the 66 who had joined at Borth, nearly 100 boys were experiencing the school for the first time *in Uppingham*.

In an effort to maintain the new spirit of co-operation, a town-school feast was held later in the summer, and a joint cricket

match took place against a Derbyshire XI. A new recreation committee was planned: among its first events were a flower show, a concert and an athletics festival, as well as a big Guy Fawkes Night celebration. Lecturers on many different topics continued through the winter with cookery and elocution classes and play readings.

The growing number of houses linking up to the new sewers seems to have had the desired effect, but there would be continuing calls for the abolition of all cesspits and the town would not be disease-free for some years. There was a brief scare late in 1877 when scarlet fever was reported at one of the hill-houses, but the case proved to be an isolated and mild one. Three smallpox cases were recorded in the town early in 1878, one of which proved to be fatal. Later that year a small-scale typhoid outbreak caused new concern about possible water impurities.

Bell criticised the RSA's clerk for letting alarmist rumours circulate by being slow to commission a water analysis. However, this eventually proved that the water company was not to blame. In many respects the company was performing well. The LGB approved its regulations, along with an agreement with the housemasters for reduced charges, on the grounds that their pupils were in Uppingham for only part of each year.

By June 1880 the LGB had begun working with the RSA to adopt a new hydrant system for extinguishing fires, flushing drains and watering the streets. The *Stamford Mercury* reported that the company had 'agreed to put at the [town's] disposal their tank of 30,000 gallons, and by starting their pump supply, 5000 gallons an hour could be kept up'.

However, the company later ran into trouble, justifying all the earlier fears of both Haviland and the RSA about the

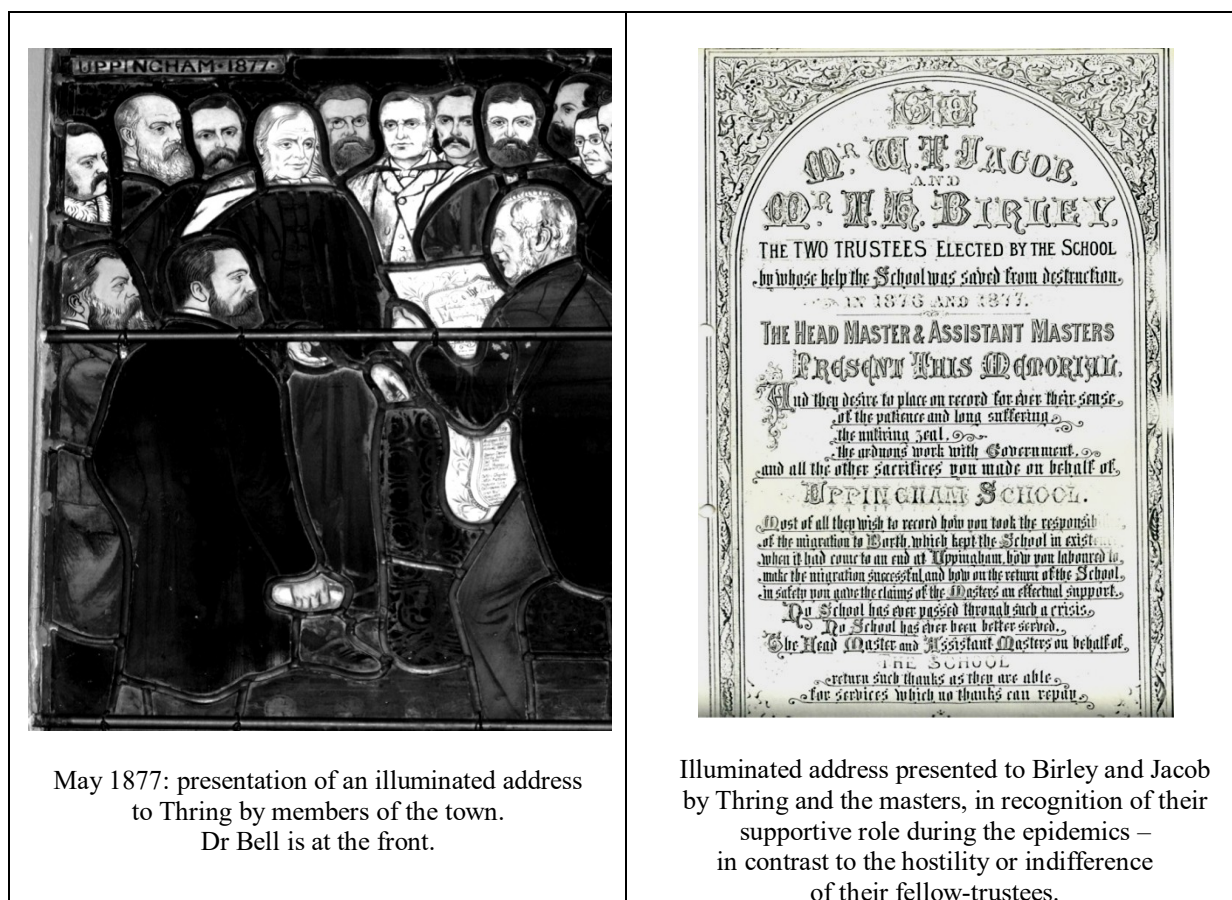
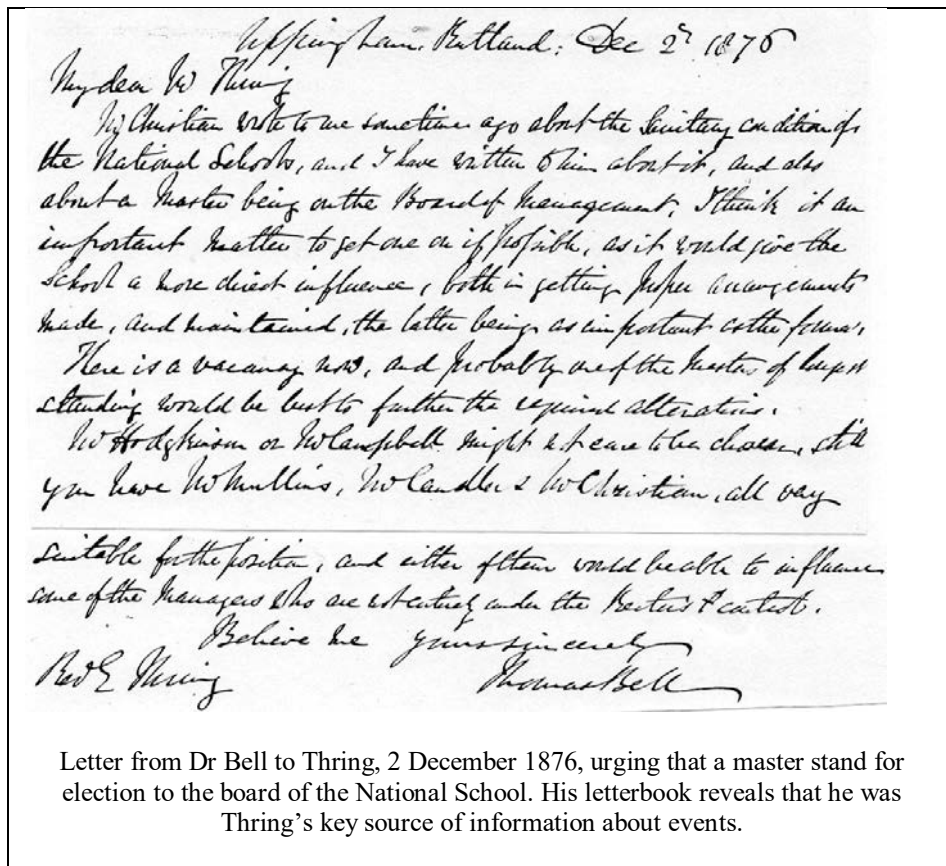
inadequacy of its technical specifications. The drillings between the sanatorium and the workhouse had initially produced large quantities of water - to the extent that the whole site around the new water tower became flooded - but the water table soon dropped, and the supply became insufficient as demand for it increased. In 1882 the summer supply was restricted to less than an hour per day.

In a desperate attempt to find additional supplies in December 1883 the water company sank a new, larger and deeper well to a depth of 112 feet, but found nothing. Headings were then driven from the bottom of the existing well in various directions before a new supply was discovered further to the north, which solved the problem for a while, and there was sufficient water in August 1888 for 'the old bathing place on the Seaton Road (to be) filled with water, after having been empty for several years'. Boating was provided on the August bank holiday, along with a band, dancing and fireworks.

However, in the same year a new boy arrived who, much later in life, recalled that 'a water-supply that was unscientific and somewhat precarious [often led] to the rumour that if it did not rain we should be sent home, and supplied the perennial jest retailed to newcomers that the water in the school bath got so thick by half-term that once an adventurous fag, adept at diving and of name unknown, had in some past era... dislocated his neck by diving into the mud'.

Notwithstanding all the problems which the company faced in its early years, by 1900 the company's shares were selling at more than six times their 1876 price.

The origin of the Uppingham typhoid outbreak and the identity of its carriers were never conclusively established.







‘One Heart - One Way’: High Street East, decorated in May 1877.



What Thring came back to: his own house, photographed in 1877.



## CHAPTER 9: RECKONING AND AFTERMATH

As life returned to normal for town and school, they both faced a financial reckoning. For the town, the parliamentary local taxation returns for Uppingham and its immediate neighbouring towns show just how much burden the RSA imposed on the local community in financing its improvements.

Taking the years 1874-83 as a whole, Uppingham's RSA spent well over twice as much as Oakham (a sanitary district slightly smaller in population) and Market Harborough (30% larger), and nearly four times as much as Melton Mowbray and Stamford (c50% larger).

Moreover, the loan which it was struggling to repay by the late 1870s was exceeded in only twenty RSAs in the whole of England and Wales, most of which had a much larger rateable value. Barnard Smith and Wales, who had warned so repeatedly about the burdens which would fall on hard-pressed ratepayers, proved to be correct in this, if less so in their assessment of the wider issues.

The school faced even greater pressures. Thring had always known that the costs would be substantial, but his desperation for the school to survive and his bitterness against his opponents had always prevailed over that realisation. He and the housemasters were hit twice, because as ratepayers they could not escape the costs of the town's improvements, while also suffering the personal financial consequences of the move to Borth.

As he had always feared, Thring found himself even more deeply in debt. Forced to end such luxuries as his annual expedition to the Lake District, he appealed to the trustees for further help. They showed scant sympathy and played for time, merely agreeing in June 1877 to reimburse the outstanding travel costs of the day boys to Borth. In October they

passed two motions implicitly critical of Thring: for a failure of accounting procedures, and for what they saw as excessively high expenditure on concerts and musical instruments. Their minute book also records:

'They had before them a memorial from the masters concerning expenses of the school at Borth. They find themselves without accurate knowledge of the particulars of [these], neither do they know who are liable for them, whether the masters as a body or individually in varying proportions. They resolve to form a committee of investigation and request to be furnished with full information, when they will further consider the subject'.

Thring must have welcomed the inclusion on this committee of Birley and Jacob, but Wales was a member too. The trustees came to believe that the debt could be gradually reduced by increasing the overall number of boarders - which they must have known Thring would greatly dislike. At their April 1878 meeting they passed a resolution 'to bring the whole financial condition of the School before the Charity Commissioners'.

The arguments dragged on for some months and through several more board meetings. In October 1878 the trustees agreed to grant payments to Thring and various masters, but these amounted to only a small fraction of their overall costs.

Thring then contacted the Commissioners himself, urging that the entire Borth expenses should be refunded. His petition was made 'with great diffidence', but also with passion about how the school had been built up through the financial contributions which he and the masters had made as 'the living representatives of the new foundation'.

He suggested that the costs to himself and his colleagues of the first epidemic in the

autumn of 1875 and of Tarbotton's recommended improvements totalled far more than the trustees' latest grants. Then, after the second outbreak in March 1876 there had been all the expenses of the move to Borth, which Thring estimated at over £3,000, to which the trustees had granted sums amounting to barely a third of those raised through Captain Withington's fighting fund.

He tried to show that the houses could not increase their boarder capacity. He also suggested that the Borth migration had merely exacerbated a longstanding problem: 'the impossibility of carrying on the school (under the fee arrangements fixed legally a decade earlier) without an increase of funds'. He believed that many thousands of £s needed to be invested in plant and equipment if the school was to function properly, and he suggested that the tuition fee be raised by one-third.

The trustees, fearful at the financial consequences if the commissioners backed Thring's petition, tried again to evade all responsibility for the move to Borth. Thring wrote to the commissioners once more on 24 May, protesting. He reiterated all the past events and the immense pressures which he and the housemasters had faced, seeking to show that he had consulted with the trustees at every stage.

His efforts were partially successful. The commission was in no doubt that 'although the removal of the school to Borth had not the express sanction of the trustees, yet their subsequent acquiescence in it must be assumed... from the part they took in the management of the school during the time of its stay [there]'. It agreed to the suggested fee increase, exempting only the very small number of day pupils.

The additional revenue would ease Thring's burdens, but no more than that: it seems certain that he and his colleagues never recouped much of the Borth expenditure. The trustees did, however,

agree to take over the sanatorium in 1878, together with its mortgage, half of which was still outstanding.

The commissioners added one further recommendation: that in the longer-term the school should buy up the houses from the housemasters. This was implemented in the years after the Great War of 1914-8: new housemasters would no longer have the burden of purchasing them from their predecessors. Then, in the years after World War Two, the school moved to end the arrangement whereby housemasters drew profits as boarding-house keepers. Henceforth they would be paid a fixed salary instead.

In most other respects, Thring had won the day. Unlike Arnold's staff at Rugby, many of whom went off to headships elsewhere, the majority of his loyal housemasters remained at Uppingham until retirement, although his relationship with Hodgkinson, once so close, never recovered from the pressures to which the epidemic exposed it. George Mullins, whose little son had been one of the early victims, lost another son in 1893, this time to pneumonia.

Thring's final decade as headmaster was quieter and more mellow. Others saw him as more distant, partly because as he became more widely known he took on many writing projects and public speaking commitments. He claimed to feel rejuvenated by his teaching, and although he was always a worrier, he felt: 'One moves amongst the masters so secure and at ease, and not on the watch any more for the next plot or stab'.

The Borth commemoration on St Barnabas' Day each June became a major event in the life of the chapel. Thring spent part of the summer at Borth during several of the following five years, always warmly welcomed: in 1880 he was greeted at the station by a brass band and a year later he preached at the local Eisteddfod. A

number of boys born in Borth in those years were named after him.

His relationship with the trustees remained difficult, partly because he struggled to produce financial accounts of the standard which they now required from him. Financial concerns dogged him for the rest of his life. He thought of retiring but he was concerned about how little capital he had accumulated over the years. This in turn led to disputes about how any pension for him might be calculated. Ironically, although the trustees had for so many years resisted spending money on new buildings for the school, in the final year of Thring's life their financial priority was not his pension arrangements but the funding of ambitious plans for new classrooms.

Thring died, still in office in October 1887, aged 66. Only after his death did the impossibility of untangling his finances from those of the school become fully apparent, to the detriment of his widow and five children who inherited barely £500 between them.

The *Times* recorded that 'a throng of mourners came from all parts of the country' to his burial in Uppingham churchyard, where one of the wreaths at his funeral came from 'the women of Borth'.

Bell remained as the school MO and in general practice, becoming MO of the workhouse and public vaccinator too on the retirement of Dr Walford. For many years he was a JP and churchwarden. He also contributed an article to *The Lancet*, in 1899, entitled *A woman disembowelled by a cow*.

He died on 11 July 1914. The school's tribute ignored his pricklier side and any shortcomings of his in 1875-6, reflecting on all that it owed him: 'His life was a constant influence for good, in school and

town. He would not give up work, and was, within a few days of his death, attending some patients: a striking example... Who shall say that England does not need such lives?'

Bell's arch-enemy, Haviland, retired in the early 1880s, and went to live on the Isle of Man. He threw himself into local life there and was much in demand as a writer and lecturer on the island's climate and geology, but he met his match as a controversialist in Revd. Theophilus Talbot.

Haviland praised the healthy Manx climate, suggesting that it resulted in very few cases of consumption in the island, but Talbot claimed repeatedly and furiously that Haviland's research was hasty and superficial: comments which are significant in view of the bitter criticisms of his earlier role in Uppingham. He later returned to the mainland and died in 1903.

Wales was rector for only two years after the school's return before retiring, first back to Northamptonshire and finally to Leamington Spa. He died in 1889. His steward (and the RSA clerk), the solicitor William H. Brown, resigned shortly after Wales left, having been exposed for stealing clients' money.

Robert Rawlinson was knighted in 1883 and remained chief engineering inspector of the LGB until 1888. Rogers Field returned to Uppingham in 1879, recommending further extension to the sewage farm on Seaton Lane. His career included advising Wellington College on its diphtheria outbreak and designing the drainage systems for both Sandringham House and Bagshot Park. He drew on his Uppingham experiences in a handbook on sanitary bye-laws adopted for national use by the LGB in 1877.

The LGB remained in existence for another forty years, although its relationship with local authorities was

significantly changed by the setting-up of county councils and county boroughs under the Local Government Act of 1888. In 1918 it was reorganised and renamed the Ministry of Health.

The Uppingham epidemic is significant in three key areas: in showing the inadequacies in local and central government systems at the time; the limitations of contemporary knowledge about epidemic disease in rural areas; and the impact of local rivalries and strong personalities in their communities.

It also contributed to better medical care in boarding schools. Less than a decade after the events which threatened Dr Bell's career, MOSA (the Medical Officers of Schools' Association) was founded. One of its first tasks was to draw up guidelines for guarding schools 'from the outbreak and spread of preventable infectious diseases', which drew heavily on events in Uppingham.

A century later, an educational historian, Professor John Honey, recorded:

'In the early decades of the [twentieth] century, a schoolmaster could still notice that illness was common enough to be a major topic of conversation in public schools: "What epidemic sickness had plagued the school last year, or last term, and what was likely to plague this term..."'

... Epidemics themselves were to become less common, and certainly less virulent, after the development of chemotherapy (e.g. M&B) in 1936 and antibiotics in the 1940s, leaving empty school sanatoria as huge white elephants to be adapted where possible in our own day as additional boarding houses.'

This adaptation is exactly what happened in Uppingham with the opening of the first girls' house, Fairfield, in 1975.

Most historians of Victorian education have seen the Borth adventure as a pivotal

event in Thring's career: one which marked the end of a period of sustained battling - both in Uppingham to get his school built and fully established, and externally against the Endowed Schools' Commission, before a final decade in which his achievements and reputation were beyond dispute, whatever his continuing battles with his employers.

The events of 1875-7 show his energy, imagination, organisational ability and visionary qualities to the full. Other schools migrated in the face of various threats - notably in the next century to get away from wartime bombing - but the scale of Thring's enforced improvisation is arguably much greater than theirs.

His obituary in the *Stamford Mercury* in 1887 quoted 'W', who had recently written to the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

'Uppingham has lost its second founder and England perhaps her ablest and certainly her most original educationalist since Arnold of Rugby... He might have been a great soldier if he had not been a great schoolmaster; for he was a born leader of men. This characteristic was never more forcibly illustrated than in 1876 - a feat unprecedented in the annals of English education'.

Thring's diaries and letters, the *Uppingham School Magazine* and the subsequent writings of his disciples need, for a full understanding of the context, to be balanced against the LGB papers, the RSA minute book and Dr Bell's *Letterbook*.

Taken as whole, they constitute a uniquely detailed study of a rural community in crisis, and a reminder of the struggles involved in securing the provision of the universal public utilities which so many of us are now privileged to take for granted.

They also support Thring's assertion, soon after his return: 'That year at Borth stands alone in the history of schools'.



Thring's 1863 schoolroom after the school's return.  
The flags in the centre background were brought back from Borth, where they had been used to summon boys to meals and lessons from their dispersed lodgings. They hung in the (Old) School Room for the next 120 years.



Thring's final summer: School House, 1887.  
His wife, Marie, and sister-in-law (Anna Koch) are to his left,  
and on either side of him are his three daughters, Sarah, Margaret and Grace.

## **The first Borth Commemoration Sermon**

delivered in the school chapel by Thring: in May 1878.

*(He inserted diagonal lines to indicate pauses in his delivery: double lines meant longer pauses).*

‘These great walls, brethren, would be dreary enough if empty, and silent,/ with the life departed from out of them./ The holy building left desolate,/ the holier and greater it is in itself,/ speaks all the more sadly of the hearts that created it,/ and the death of the hopes and the prayers/ that made it,/ and lived in it./

It is hard at this moment of thanksgiving/ to bring back that other moment,/ when eyes looked up at these statues, the silent memorials of a grateful heart,/ and thoughts of the life they embodied arose within,/ thoughts of the spirit power that is in every true gift of these gifts offered here/ arose,/ accompanied by the stern questioning,/"Is it all over?/ Shall these eyes never more see them again?/ Is an end indeed come?/ And though future years may fill the walls with a fresh tide of life,/ are we and ours swept out of them to return no more?"//

On that last Sunday, as I took my last look,/I can truly say that the only thought, which made me think I should return,/was the thought/ of the spirit life that has been lavished in this House of God,/ the heart-blood that its courses have been laid in,/the faith and truth that has given and received life/from this holy voice in stone,/ which we call our chapel,/ But for that/I had believed the end had come./ And others must have had the same questionings in their hearts.//

We went out,/unknowing where,/unknowing what might lie before us./ We went out,/but not empty./ We had a treasure to guard,/a trust to keep,/an heritage that might not be cast away,/as long as there was any hope of saving it./ We had the honour/and discipline,/and law,/and order,/of this school,/its living freight of character/and truth, in charge;/and we might not leave it;/we might not desert it;/as long as there was any hope of saving that life.//

Do not think/I have forgotten/ the ruin that would have come on houses, and homes,/had we broken to pieces then,/and had to begin afresh elsewhere,/with the past of this school wiped out./I have not forgotten it.// But it was for the sake of the life that the boys of this school/have received,/ embody,/and pass on to their successors,/ that we did not break in pieces.// And moreover/bad as that ruin would have been,/it would not have been hopeless./ Our own fortunes might have risen again;/but the school once scattered,/the life of its years of growth brought to an end,/that could not be recalled.// A new school might have come in time,/but it would have been new./ This school life would have perished with the school which was the life./

So we went out,/carrying with us the hope of saving that life,/and with the resolve not to desert our posts as long as that hope remained.// And we went out with a *Great Deliverance*,/ a deliverance so perfect,/that it now seems as a dream,/ a deliverance so perfect/that we cannot realise how close the doom was;/only one week./ In only one week,/had not the deliverance been,/all would have been over here;/and silence,/and emptiness,/and stories of the past,/all that would have remained of this school./ Shall we, because the deliverance was so perfect/that many never knew the danger/shall we/think lightly of the deliverance?/ Because God spared us,/first,/ the utter overthrow that came so close,/ that we could count its hours :/and next,/spared us the wasting and slow decay of an imperfect escape,/and half measures,/shall we/think lightly of the deliverance?/

*(continued overleaf)*

On that last Sunday/the lesson for the day was the lesson we have heard this day also./ How Jacob awaked out of his sleep/and said,/"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not,"/And how he said,/"If I come again to my father's house in peace/then shall the Lord be my God."/ Yes,/like Jacob we hold our thanksgiving today for a great deliverance;/ and year by year/I trust,/as long as this school lives,/the memory of its life preserved shall be commemorated as it is on this day/— that strange flight,/the home we found,/the strange return/—and every year shall deepen the feeling of a great deliverance,/and make us say with Jacob: "The Lord is in this place. The Lord shall be our God."/

We are too close to it as years pass;/ as time passes on,/what has happened will be better seen,// And is not a Society in its living bound together by bonds of life and truth?/ Is not the holder of the promise,/even as Jacob was?/ He went forth with the promise in faith;/and we now feel/that as long as he and his were true to that promise/they would not perish./ Who does not feel/that when the Red Sea opened to let Israel through/it was part of a great past, and a certainty that a great future lay before them,/and that the promise was theirs,/slaves though they had been?/ The great deliverance proved it./

And, brethren, may not we hold fast to higher hopes of living life,/because/our life has been delivered by so high a deliverance?/When God takes a people,/and separated them,/and gives them special judgements,/and chastises them with special chastisements,/and brings them low,/through oppression,/ or any plague,/or trouble,/in a special way,/and then deliver them by a special deliverance,/so that all the world see it,/and we are astonished,/and speak of it;/surely all this is as a prophecy of life to some,/and a confirmation of life that is./ Whoso is wise will ponder these things.//

Remember/a great deliverance is also a great judgment reversed;/ a great warning,/as well as a great prophecy;/a great fear/as well as a great thanksgiving./ Wherever the destroying angel has set his foot,/and yet holds his hand and spares,/is evermore holy ground,/ even as the threshing floor of Hannah, the Jebusite,/which David bought to build God's temple on./ We too live evermore,/if we are wise,/under the shadow of our great overthrow,/under the light of our great deliverance./

We too shall consecrate,/ if we are wise,/a great consecration of self to God,/putting away from the midst of us all evil leaven,/girding ourselves for truer life,/and each/quietly upholding the other/to make the life that has been so wonderfully and passing on the deep feeling of life redeemed so strangely,/ from year to year/as long as these walls last./ The story of it will live whatever you do./ It is yours to make it live,/not as an old and curious story,/but as a birth-time of new honour/and new truth,/ ever fresh in the living roll call of the sons of promise.//

Nor let us forget today/the kindly people with whom we found a home;/ by whose welcome, and whose goodness we brought that eventful year to a happy end./ If it was an honour to you/that they bore witness to the school/that nothing mean had been done by you,/their witness was their greatest honour:/ proof that they value true life,/proof that true life was at home with them, and possible./ Every true son of Uppingham,/as long as these walls last, will feel his heart glow at the history of that year;/and a great company, fear and wonder, gratitude, and praise will throng his memory;/a volume of life past,/and life to come, of judgment, prophecy,/and promise/will be bound up for the child of promise/in the name of Borth.'

## Membership of the Uppingham Union --

Name	Place of home	Occupation	Attendance:				TOTAL	Membership:
			4:75 -9:75	10:75 -3:76	4:76 -9:76	10:76 -1:77		
SMITH, BARN'D	Glaston	Rector	26	27	22	12	87	Ch SC/Ed
SIMKIN CH	Wardley	Farmer decd1/76	12	4			16	VC/SC
FOSTER GE	Uppm	Solict/landowner	22	19	2		43	
PARKER J	Preston	Farmer	10	9	10	6	35	
ROOKE S	Gretton	Farmer	19	7	16	11	53	SC/Ed
SHEILD W	Upp	Solicitor	6	15	13	7	41	SC
WALES W	Upp	Rector	6	13	12	7	38	SCeo:Ed:UT
WOODCOCK J	High/Add St	Baker/g'grocer?	20	23	20	14	77	
WORTLEY E	Rid'lton/Brooke	Farmer	4	10	17	8	39	VC/SCCh 77
BAINES W	Ridlgton/Seaton	Farmer	5	4	5	5	14	
BELL T	High St	Surgeon/Dr			14	11	25	SC76
BERRY	Medbourne	Farmer	1	1			2	
BRYAN JH	Stoke Dry	Farmer	2	1	1		4	
BURTON J	Drayton	Farmer	5	10	8	1	24	SC
CLARKE	High St	Blacking manuf	3	2	2	2	9	
CORRY	?				3		3	
DENNIS	N Luffenham	Clergy						SCeo
EVANS FREKE	BisbrHall	Landowner	1	4	5	1	11	SCeo:Ed:UT
GRIMSDICK	Slawston	Farmer			2	1	3	
HAY	Beaumont Chase	Farmer						
HENWICKE	?		1				1	
HOLLAND	Drayton	Farmer	8	7			15	
JOHNSON	Bisbrooke	Farmer		4	4	2	10	
LETTTS	Medbourne	Farmer	3	5	3		11	
MARCHANT	Easton Magna	Farmer		5	4	4	13	
MOULD	Easton Magna	Farmer			4	2	6	
PIERCY	Slawston, Lcs	Clergy				1	1	SCeo
PRIDMORE	S Luffenham	Farmer	1	3	5	5	14	
PRETTY G	S Luffenham	Farmer	1				1	
ROBINSON	Oakham Rd	Glass/china/corn	3		2	2	7	
ROYCE	Laxton/Oakham?	Farmer	1	1	2	3	7	
SANDERS	?		2				2	
SATCHELL	Gretton	Farmer	1	4	4	4	13	
SHARMAN	?					2	2	
SHELTON J	Barrowden	Fmr/Wheel inn	6	5	3	2	16	
SIMKIN N	Hallaton	Gent/farmer			3	1	4	OT SC76
THOMPSON	Stoke Dry	Clergy		2	1		3	SCeo
WADE	Wardley	Farmer			4	2	6	SC76

### Key to membership column:

Ch = chairman

VC = vice chairman

SC = Sanitary ctee eo = ex officio

Ed = education ctee

UT = trustee of Uppingham School

OT = trustee of Oakham Sch.

### Houses and housemasters: 1875/7

The School House      Revd. E Thring  
 Lorne House            W. Campbell  
 Constables            Revds. TB Rowe/AJ Tuck  
 Brooklands            Revd. WJ Earle  
 Corner of School Lane      CW Cobb  
 Fircroft                WF Rawnsley

The Lodge            S Haslam  
 Red House            Revd. B Hesketh Williams  
 West Deyne            Revd. GH Mullins  
 Highfield            Revd. WAE Vale-Bagshawe  
 West Bank            H Candler  
 Redgate                Revd. G Christian





Celebrations in May 1877: High Street East looking towards the school.



Thring in his final year: 1887.



High Street West in 1870 looking west.  
The nearest building on the left is the house on the corner of School Lane,  
where the third outbreak of typhoid first appeared.



High Street West in 1877, looking towards the town centre.  
Note the improvement compared with the 1870 picture.

## Victorian England's Forgotten Visionary: a brief biography of Thring

Revd. Edward Thring (1821-87) is most often credited as the man who founded the Headmasters' Conference (HMC) of leading independent schools in 1869. Five years earlier he had published *Education and School*, a book which pleaded passionately for filling young minds with 'Life Power', rather than merely cramming them with facts. Unlike other headmasters of his day, he rejected a classics-only curriculum and championed independent learning and a huge range of academic and technical subjects, music and sports, along with large play-areas and gardens. Lower-ability pupils merited as much attention as the brilliant. Classes must be taught by full-time career-schoolmasters, with smaller groups for the strugglers. Teaching the less gifted should never be seen as a chore, given only to junior staff: 'A good teacher ought to rejoice in a stupid boy as an interesting problem... To teach an upper form requires more knowledge, but a lower one more skill in a teacher'. Punishments must be proportionate and purposeful. Public disgrace merely eroded self-respect, 'making criminals, not mending them'. Praepostors (prefects) must promote responsibility throughout the entire pupil-body, because trust and fairness counter-acted bullying. Boarding schools must have high-quality accommodation and food. Every boy, however junior, must have an individual space: 'A boy's study is his castle'. Open dormitories were an anathema, and partitioned cubicles an essential.

Thring's reputation was cemented by *Theory and Practice of Teaching* (1883), a book which went through seventeen reprints and sold across the world. A handbook for his profession and a precursor of child-centred education, it challenged parents to ask why children found schools so un-friendly. Teachers must get inside young minds to instil a love of learning and an appreciation of language; teach sentence analysis; encourage reading aloud with clear enunciation; help children to develop visual and drawing skills. They had to prepare lessons scrupulously, and to record how different children reacted to them. Exams ought to test skills as well as factual knowledge; they should be 'just, certain and not liable to shift by change of examiners'. Above all, in children it was 'impossible to overrate the importance of giving confidence. Very much of what is called idleness and inattention is only utter bewilderment'. He criticised parents who saw schools as mere service-providers. He described how, in an age of fast-changing technology, there was 'much boasting of the money being spent in schools... much rushing to and fro... authority busy at work'. He championed teachers ('skilled workmen') against government officials ('amateurs in perpetuity'). He questioned officialdom's competence to spend large budgets wisely, and he insisted that inspections encouraged depressing uniformity, testing only whether schools were 'cut to the state pattern'. He railed against 'ignorant and hostile' school governors.

Thring's ideas were deeply rooted in his own experience: his happy childhood in Somerset; his harsh grammar school in Ilminster, and then the rats and anarchic violence of Eton's notorious Long Chamber. King's College, Cambridge offered only a brief respite before he plunged into a teaching curacy in the Gloucester slums: a vivid lesson in personal and professional development which gave him a nervous breakdown. After recuperative travels in Europe he became headmaster of the small grammar school in Uppingham in 1853, inheriting around 40 pupils but turning it, over three decades, into a boarding school of more than 300 boys, despite having no institutional backers and being forced to rely on personal loans and rich housemasters who ran satellite enterprises around him.

In the 1860s the commissioners investigating the state of England's endowed grammar schools were astounded that he played football and cricket with his pupils. He formed HMC because he feared that schools would be ever-more regulated by government, and despite spectacular rebuffs from suspicious, individualist fellow-Heads. Then came typhoid, the near-closure of the school for good, and Borth.

A dynamic but deeply insecure man, Thring could be at times unreasonably dictatorial and dogmatic. He told his masters: 'I am supreme here, and I will brook no interference'. Yet he was also deeply sensitive - a man who held that 'Man most imitates God when he scatters pleasure as God does, and makes it possible for others to be glad'.

*(continued on next page)*

Thring's story tells us much about how Victorian headmasters shaped the cultural attitudes and leadership styles of a generation of adults - including several future prime ministers - and later sustained those who would mourn sons killed on the Great War battlefields, where Uppingham's dead included the brother and the fiancé of Vera Brittain, author of *Testament of Youth*. Urging his boys to do good in the world, he rejoiced as some of his former pupils formed a pioneering Mission in London's East End. His godson and former pupil (Canon HD Rawnsley), whom he introduced to the Lake District, became a founder of the National Trust. He corresponded intensely with best-selling children's author, Juliana Ewing. Scorned by some as an over-grown 'King of Boys', his final years brought disappointment with both his sons and deep worries about his own future. Yet he also became a champion of educational opportunities for women, hosting the fledgling Headmistresses' Conference in the final year of his life. A striking photograph survives of him surrounded by his 59 female visitors.

Taken dramatically ill in chapel in October 1887, he died a week later in his boarding house, leaving little money for his family because of his huge investment in his school - a situation which does little credit to his trustees/governors (or the Charity Commission). Although by far the best-known headmaster in the generation after Thomas Arnold of Rugby, his views became unfashionable for a time after his death. He vanished into comparative obscurity during the growing militarism of the years before the 1914-18 war, but has been widely recognised in and beyond Uppingham since then for his breadth of educational vision.

Thring's great mantra was that 'everybody learning to use time well is the one secret of a good and healthy moral life'. His fear was of a world in which teachers had time only to teach lessons, thus becoming 'ill-tempered machines', too busy to 'share in and promote [pupils'] joys and to hear of their latest new discovery'. His distinctive vision for a highly respected teaching profession inspired its members, and he championed the true nature of teaching and learning, and the importance of the pupil's perspective.

## Some suggestions for further reading

Bryan Matthews: *By God's Grace... A History of Uppingham School* (Whitehall Press, 1984).

GR Parkin (ed): *Edward Thring, Headmaster of Uppingham School: Life, Diary and Letters* (Macmillan, 2 volumes: 1898; single volume 1900). Sir George Parkin was mentored as a young Canadian headmaster by Thring, and was chosen by him to be his literary executor.

JH Skrine: *Uppingham by the Sea* (Macmillan, 1878). A short contemporary narrative, presenting the school's time at Borth in glowing terms, by Thring's disciple and colleague.

Nigel Richardson: (1) *A Spring Invasion*, (2020). The companion publication to this, focusing on events in Borth; (2) *Typhoid in Uppingham: Analysis of a Victorian Town and School in Crisis 1875-1877* (Pickering and Chatto, 2008). A monograph which includes the national public health context; expanded from a Ph.D. thesis for University College, London, 2006); (3) *Thring of Uppingham: Victorian Educator* (University of Buckingham Press, 2014). A biography, with a fuller reading list.

Malcolm Tozer: *The Ideal of Manliness* (Sunnyrest Books, 2015). It explains Thring's philosophy of life.

Vivian Anthony: *Chancellor William Wales: Rector of Uppingham 1859-79: Church leader and rebuilder* (Rutland Record 40, 2020). It includes details of his struggles with non-conformists: a further dimension to his complex web of relationships within the town.

Auriol Thomson: *A Study of roles and relationships in a Rutland Village in the mid Victorian period: Glaston c1860-90* (MA in English Local History, Leicester University, June 1999). It includes information about Barnard Smith.





School Gate, 1863. The decorations celebrated the marriage of Albert Edward, Prince of Wales (later King Edward VII) and Princess Alexandra. Thring's house is in the background.

ISBN 978-1-9196205-0-3



9 781919 620503 >